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THE QUEEN'S MARIES.

A ROMANCE OF HOLYROOD.

BY

G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF 'DIGBY GRAND,' 'THE INTERPRETER,' 'HOLMBY HOUSE,'
'GOOD FOR NOTHING,' ETC.

VOLUME I.

F
LONDON:
PARKER, SON, AND BOURN, WEST STRAND.
1862.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY G. PHIPPS, 13 & 14, TOTHILL STREET,
WESTMINSTER.

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TO A LADY

WHOSE UNTIRING ENERGY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

HAVE ADDED LARGELY TO THE LITERATURE

OF OUR COUNTRY, AND WHOSE

ELOQUENT DEFENCE OF A CALUMNIATED QUEEN,

HAS IDENTIFIED WITH MARY STUART,

THE NAME OF

AGNES STRICKLAND,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

Bartrams, Hampstead,
June 1862.

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THE QUEEN'S MARIES.

A ROMANCE OF HOLYROOD.

' Yestreen the Queen had four Maries,
The day she'll hae but three,
There was Mary Beton, and Mary Seton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me.'

CHAPTER I.

' Turn back, turn back, ye weel-fau'red May,
My heart will break in three,
And sae did mine on yon bonny hill-side,
When ye wadna let me be!'



ANY a smiling plain, many a wooded slope and sequestered valley, adorns the fair province of Picardy. Nor is it without reason, that her Norman-looking sons and handsome daughters are proud of their birth-place; but the most prejudiced of them will hardly be found to affirm that her sea-board is either picturesque or interesting, and perhaps the strictest search would fail

to discover a duller town than Calais in the whole bounds of France. With the gloom of night settling down upon the long low line of white sand which stretches westward from the harbour, and an angry surge rising on the adjacent shoal, while out to seaward darkness is brooding over the face of the deep, an unwilling traveller might, indeed, be induced to turn into the narrow ill-paved streets of the town, on the seamanlike principle of running for any port in a storm; but it would be from the sheer necessity of procuring food and lodging, not from any delusive expectation of gaiety and amusement, essential ingredients in a Frenchman's every-day life. And yet Calais has been the scene of many a thrilling incident and stirring event. Could they speak, those old houses with their pointed gables, their overhanging roofs and quaint diamond-paned windows, they could tell some strange tales of love and war, of French and English chivalry, of deeds of arms performed for the sake of honour and beauty and ambition and gold, the four strings on which most of the tunes are played that speed the Dance of Death, of failures and successes, hopes and disappointments, the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the cross-purposes, the hide and seek that constitute the game of Life. In that very house over the way yonder, with its silent court-yard, in which the grass shoots up vigorously between the stones, and from which to-day nothing more unusual issues than an old peasant woman in a clean cap, carrying a young child with a dirty face, slept, perhaps, the loveliest woman the world ever saw, a widow while yet a bride, a Queen while yet a child, on her way from one royal throne to take possession of

another. Yes, here she lay the night before she quitted her dear France, never to see it again ; the bright, the beautiful, the beloved, a very rose amongst all the flowers of the garden, a very gem amongst all the gold and tinsel that surrounded her, the link in a line of kings, the pride of two countries, the fairest of God's creatures—Mary, Queen of Scots—here she lay, with life and love and hope before her, and slept, and dreamed not of Fotheringay.

It was a chill autumn night. Beyond the walls a rising breeze moaned fitfully over the dreary flats. The ebbing tide murmured as it receded, returning, and yet returning, as though loth to leave that comfortless expanse of wet level sand. A few drops of rain fell from time to time, and though a star struggled out here and there, the sky became momentarily more obscured. It was a gloomy night out at sea yonder ; it was a gloomy night here on shore, dismal, foreboding, and suggestive of Farewell.

But within the town, bustle and hurry, and a certain amount of confusion, not unmixed with revelry, imparted considerable life and animation to the hours of darkness, scaring indeed some of the quiet householders, and rousing the echoes in the narrow streets. Horses, picketed in the market-place, stamped and snorted and shook their bridles, spurs clanked on the pavement, steel corslet and head-piece flashed in the light of torches held by bearded men-at-arms, looking doubly martial in that red glare. Here might be seen a dainty page in satin doublet, with velvet cap and feather, elbowing some sturdy groom who was bearing a cuirass home from the armourer's, or leading a charger to its

stall, and enquiring, with all a page's freedom, for the lodging of his lord, to receive, probably, an answer neither respectful nor explanatory, but productive of a stinging retort, for in those days the pages of a great house were masters of all weapons, but especially of the tongue. There might be observed a group of peasant-women in clean hoods and aprons, with baskets on their heads, lingering somewhat longer than was absolutely necessary to exchange with harquebusiers or spearmen those compliments in which the French imagination is so prolific, and which the French language renders with such graceful facility. Anon, a lord of high degree, easily recognized by the dignity of his bearing, and the number of his retainers thronging round him with arms and torches, passed along the streets, exciting the curiosity of the vulgar, and the admiration of the softer sex, while more than one churchman, threading his way quietly homeward, dropped his 'Benedicite' with gentle impartiality amongst the throng. The blessing was usually received with gratitude, though an exception might occur in the person of some stalwart man-at-arms, large of limb, fresh-coloured, and fair-bearded, who returned the good man's greeting with derision or contempt. These reprobates were invariably well armed, and extremely soldier-like in their bearing, to be distinguished moreover by their blue velvet surcoats, on which St. Andrew's Cross was embroidered in silver, and the peculiar form of their steel-lined bonnets, which they wore with a jaunty air on one side the head. Something also, of more than the usual assumption of a soldier might be traced in their demeanour, as is apt to be the case with

the members of a *corps d'élite*, and such the Archers of the Scottish Body-guard had indeed a right to be considered both by friend and foe. Although in the service of His Most Catholic Majesty, many of them, including their captain, the unfortunate Earl of Arran, were staunch Protestants, and at that rancorous period the supporters of the Reformed Church did by no means confine themselves to a silent abnegation of the errors they had renounced.

One Archer, however, a young man with nothing peculiarly striking either in face or figure, save an air of frankness and quiet determination on his sun-burnt brow, acknowledged the benediction of a passing ecclesiastic with a humility that excited the jeers of two or three comrades, to which he replied with the quiet simplicity that seemed to be a part of his character, 'An old man's blessing, lads, can do neither you nor me any harm,' and proceeded on his way without further remark or explanation; while the manner in which his rebuke was received by the scorners themselves, denoted that he was at least a person of some consideration and standing in the corps. Elbowing his way through a gaudy crowd, consisting of the Marquis d'Elboeuf's retainers, who were accompanying their master in his attendance on his royal niece, and certain satellites of the House of Guise, for the Duke and Duchess, with Cardinal Lorraine, had already escorted the Queen of Scotland thus far upon her journey, our Archer turned into an auberge, already filled with a mixture of courtiers, soldiers, pages, men-at-arms, and other officials, and seating himself at a small deal table, coarse and clean, requested to be served, in a tone of

impatience that implied a vigorous appetite, and a long fast. While the host, quick, courteous, and smiling, bustled up to him, with napkin, trencher, and some two feet of bread, the Archer removed the bonnet from his brow, and, looking around him, nodded to one or two acquaintances with an air of considerable pre-occupation, ere he subsided into a profound fit of abstraction, which, to judge by his countenance, proceeded from no agreeable theme.

He was a man of less than thirty summers, sufficiently well built, and of ordinary stature, with no peculiar advantages of person or bearing, that should distinguish him from any other gentleman-private of the Scottish Body-guard. His arms, indeed, were scrupulously clean, and of the best workmanship, for when a man's life depends daily on the quality of his blade, such details become a matter of course; and if his apparel were a thought more carefully put on, and of a more precise cut than that of his fellows, this distinction seemed but to arise from that habitual attention to trifles which is the usual concomitant of energy and readiness for action. A sloven *may* be a brave man, and a capable; but if the machine is to remain in good working order, every screw should fit to a hair's breadth, and a coat of varnish over the whole, will not detract from its efficiency. Our Archer then was well but not splendidly dressed, nor would his face more than his figure have attracted the attention of any casual observer. Nine men out of ten would have passed him by unnoticed. A woman would have been first puzzled, then interested, perhaps eventually fascinated, by the quiet repose of that stern, calm brow.

It was a face of which the expression was many years older than the features. A physiognomist would have detected in it, resolution, tenacity of purpose, strong feeling repressed by habitual self-control—above all, self-denial, and great power of suffering.

For the rest, his complexion, where not tanned by the weather, was fair and fresh-coloured, according well with the keen grey eye, and light brown hair of his Scottish origin.

The Archer's meditations, however, were soon put to flight by the agreeable interruption of a well-served supper (for, indeed, prior to those days, as old Froissart will bear us witness, the French excelled in cookery); and after the first cravings of appetite were appeased, he emptied a cup of red wine with a sigh of considerable satisfaction, then returned to his platter with renewed vigour, and filled his goblet once more to the brim.

'Good wine drowns care,' said a laughing voice behind him; 'and Cupid himself cannot fly when his wings are drenched. Ho! drawer, quick! Another flask of Burgundy, and place me a chair by my pearl of Scottish Archers, till he tells me what brings him here eighty leagues from Paris, unless it be to mingle his tears with the salt brine of the accursed Channel that bears our White Queen* from the shores of France.'

An expression of pain shot rapidly over the Archer's face as he greeted the speaker with a cordial grasp of

* Mary was called "La Reine Blanche," because she mourned in *white* for her first husband, Francis II.

the hand ; but he answered in the deep steady tones that were habitual to him.

‘A man may have despatches to carry from the Constable to his son, and d’Amville is not likely to overlook a soldier’s delay on such a road as this, where there are as many horses as poplar trees. I could take the Montmorency’s orders yesterday at noon, and be here to supper to-night, without borrowing the Pegasus you ride so recklessly, my poetical friend.’

The other laughed gaily—and when he laughed, his dark eyes flashed and sparkled like diamonds.

‘My Pegasus,’ said he, ‘needs oftener the spur than the rein ; but who could not write verses, and sing them too, with such a theme before him? Listen, my friend. I am to sail to-morrow with them for Scotland. Heaven’s blessings on d’Amville that he has selected me to accompany him! Nay, we are appointed to the Queen’s galley ; and Mary will take at least one heart along with her as loyal and devoted as any she can leave behind.’

He checked himself suddenly, and a sad, wistful expression crossed his handsome brow, whilst the dark eyes dimmed, and he set down untasted the Burgundy he had lifted to his lips. Something in his voice, too, seemed to have enlisted the Archer’s sympathy, and he also was silent for a moment, and averted his looks from his companion’s face.

After a while, he forced himself to speak.

‘I must return,’ said he, ‘in two more days. Is it true they embark without fail to-morrow? Is there no danger from the ships of England? Is Her Majesty well accompanied? Doth the household sail with her? Ladies and all?’

‘The Maries, of course,’ replied the other, answering only the last question, which he reasonably considered the most interesting to his listener; ‘and right glad they seem to be to quit this merry land of France for that cold bleak country, where I hear, music is scarcely known, and dancing interdicted as a sin! I marvel much at their taste. To be sure, they accompany one who would inspire the wildest savages with chivalry, and make the veriest desert a Paradise! Ah! when was such a garland of beauty ever trusted to the waves? The Queen and her satellites! One lovelier than another, but all paling before her. A bumper, my friend! on your knees a bumper—a health to the letter M! nay, pledge me one for each of the four, and a fresh flask for the Queen—for the Queen!’

Again the speaker’s voice sank to a whisper, and the Archer who had ere now recovered the usual indifference of his demeanour, proceeded to do justice to a toast which could not, according to the manners of the age, have been refused, and which, in truth, for reasons of his own, he was by no means loth to pledge. The table at which they sat, however, was by this time surrounded by the different frequenters of the auberge, for the Archer’s companion, no other than the poet Chastelâr, was too well-known and popular an individual in the gay circles of France to remain long unnoticed, where so many of her nobility were congregated. Young, handsome, and well-born, his romantic disposition and undoubted talents had rendered him an especial favourite, with a people who, above all things, delight to be amused, and with whom enthusiasm, whether real or affected, is generally accepted as an equivalent for merit. To look

on Chastelâr, with his long dark curls and his bright eyes, was to behold the poet-type in its most attractive form; and when to beauty of feature and delicacy of mind, were added a graceful figure, skill in horsemanship, as in all knightly exercises, great kindness of disposition, and gentle birth, what wonder that with the ladies of the French Court, to be in love with Chastelâr was as indispensable a fashion as to wear a pointed stomacher, or a delicate lace edging to the ruff? And Chastelâr, with true poet-nature, sunned himself in their smiles, and enjoyed life intensely, as only such natures can, and bore about with him the while, unsuspected and incurable, a sorrow near akin to madness in his heart.

As gallant after gallant strolled up to the table at which the two friends sat, the conversation became general, turning, as such conversations usually do, on the congenial themes of Love and War. Again and again was mine host summoned for fresh supplies of wine, and the Archer, whose recent arrival from Paris made him an object of general interest, was plied with questions as to the latest news and gossip of the capital. Richly mounted swords were laid aside on the coarse deal table, cloaks of velvet and embroidery draped the uncouth chairs, gilt spurs jingled on the humble floor, and voices that had bandied opinions with kings in council, or shouted 'St. Denis!' in the field, were now exchanging jest and laugh and repartee under the homely roof of a common wine-shop.

Even the Marquis d'Elbœuf, the Queen's uncle, a lord of the princely house of Guise, and Admiral of France, joined with a sailor's frankness in the gay

revel, and taking a seat between Chastelâr and the Archer, questioned the latter as to his late interview with the Constable, and the well-being of that distinguished veteran, a soldier of whom every man in France was proud.

‘And you made sail with the despatches the moment you were out of his sight,’ observed the Marquis. ‘I’ll warrant you made a fair wind of it all the way to Calais, for the Montmorency brooks no delay in the execution of his orders. How looked he, my friend?—and what said he? Come, tell us the exact words.’

‘He looked like an old lion, as he always does,’ answered the Archer, simply; ‘and he said to me in so many words, “These letters must be in my son’s hands within eight-and-forty hours. I can depend upon you Scots. May the blessing of Our Lady be upon you, my child. And now, Right—Face! and go to the devil!”’

The Marquis laughed heartily.

‘He loves your countrymen well,’ said he, ‘and with reason; I have heard him swear, the bravest man he ever saw was a Scot.’

A murmur of dissent, if not disapproval, rose around the table, and many of the Frenchmen present bent their brows in manifest impatience; but the Marquis, who had his own reasons for wishing to be well with the Scottish nation, and whose frank nature brooked no withdrawal or modification of his opinions, struck his hand on the board till the cups leaped again, and repeated in loud tones—

‘A Scot!—Yes, gentlemen—a Scot. And I know why he said so—for I too was present at the boldest

feat-of-arms even the Constable ever witnessed, and so was my modest friend here with the Cross of St. Andrew on his breast, only he was but a stripling then, and had hardly strength to hold his pike at the Advance. A health, gentlemen. Do me reason. To the memory of Norman Leslie, Master of Rothes! One of your difficult Scotch names. Norman Leslie, the bravest of the brave!—Will you hear the story?

‘Tell it, Marquis!’ was repeated on all sides, and cups were set down empty on the board, as many an eager warlike face turned towards the Admiral of France.

‘It was at Rentz, then,’ proceeded d’Elbœuf, ‘where the old Emperor out-generalled *us*, as completely as we out-fought *him*, and the two armies were almost within bow-shot of each other. We resembled a couple of angry dogs that are not permitted by their masters to fight. A clear slope of some two or three hundred paces divided us, and the German light-horsemen came galloping out to skirmish, tossing their lances in the air and bantering us. There must have been, at least, a hundred of them within a pistol-shot of our lines. The blood of Frenchmen soon boils up, gentlemen, but we had no orders to engage, and I, for one, kept my men-at-arms in hand, for the King was commanding in person, and Condé, and the Constable, and the Duc d’Anguien were present, and likely to visit any breach of discipline with severe reproof. Ah! they cannot thus interfere with us at sea; but I ground my teeth at intervals, and thought, if the order would only come, what short work we would make with the German dogs.

‘Norman Leslie, however, had come up after the coun-

cil was over in the King's tent, and so, I suppose, fancied himself free to act. He had but half a score men with him at most, but he formed them into line, and charged up the hill into the thick of the enemy. It was a noble sight to see him, gentlemen, in his coat of black velvet, with its broad white crosses, and his burnished armour, with a red Scotch bonnet on his head. How he drove that good grey horse of his a dozen lances' lengths ahead of his following! He rode through and through the Germans as if they were a troop of children at play. We, in the lines, I tell you, counted five of them go down before his lance broke. Then he drew his sword, and though they shot at him with musquetoons and culverines, we could still see the red bonnet glancing to and fro, like fire among the smoke. At last they detached a company of spearmen to surround him, and then striking spurs into his horse, he came galloping back to our lines, and rode gallantly to salute the Constable in the centre. As he kissed his sword-hilt, the good grey fell dead at Montmorency's feet. Alas! his master followed him in less than a fortnight, for though the King sent his own leech to dress his wounds, brave Norman Leslie was hurt in so many places, that it was out of the power of leech-craft to save him. What say you, gentlemen? a bolder feat-of-arms than that was never attempted by a soldier, and it was executed by a Scot! What say you of a man that would ride through an armed host single-handed, to fetch away a laurel-leaf?'

The Archer smiled, and bowed low at this flattering tribute to his nation.

'I might return your compliments, Marquis,' said

he, 'had we not a Scotch proverb which implies "*Stroke me and I will stroke thee.*" And yet it is but fair to say I have known a rougher ride than even Norman Leslie's, taken for a silk handkerchief, and by a Frenchman.'

'A silk handkerchief! a lady's of course,' said one. 'A love-token!' exclaimed another. 'Undertaken in deliverance of a vow,' suggested a third. 'Done by an Englishman for a wager,' laughed a fourth,—all had some remark to make except Chastelâr, whose colour rose visibly and who looked distressed and ill-at-ease.

'A handkerchief of the softest Cyprus silk,' insisted the Archer in his quiet impressive voice, 'and rescued by the very man to whom I this day presented his father's letters. And yet it is no wonder that the Constable's son and a Marshal of France, should be a brave man. I tell you, gentlemen, that I saw d'Amville at the head of a band of Huguenots sorely pressed and outnumbered by his countrymen of the Catholic faith, so that he had but one chance of retreat in placing a rapid stream betwixt himself and his pursuers. As he was facing the enemy, whilst the last of his followers entered the water, a handkerchief dropped unnoticed from beneath his corslet. He discovered his loss, however, as soon as he reached the opposite bank, and dashing once more into the stream under a murderous fire, charged through the press of men-at-arms to the spot where it lay, dismounted, picked it up, and cut his way back again to his own troop. There was blood on the handkerchief when his page unarmed him that night, but I think it was the blood of the bravest man in France.'

‘And the handkerchief?’—cried several voices. ‘Whose was it?’ ‘Who gave it to him?’ ‘Happy the lady who owned so true a Knight.’

The Archer smiled once more.

‘Nay, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘it was no love-token after all. But the Marshal is the soul of loyalty as of honour. There was an M. and a crown-royal embroidered on the margin. It belonged to the White Queen—to her whom France is to lose to-morrow for ever.’

‘What a theme for the minstrel!’ exclaimed d’Elbœuf gaily. ‘Chastelâr! can’st thou hear and be silent? Awake man! drench thy brain with Burgundy, and improvise us some stanzas!’

The poet looked up with the air of one who shakes some painful burden off his mind. He put his cup to his lips, and answered gaily enough,

‘Not on that theme, Marquis, at least to-night. Is it not the eve of our departure? And can there be merriment for France when she thinks of all she is to lose on the morrow? Nay, gentlemen, if you must have a song let it be a lament. Let France mourn the absence of one whose like she may never hope to see again.’

Seats were drawn nearer the table—the guests’ faces assumed an air of interest and expectation. Through the open door-way might be seen the humbler servants of the household crowding eagerly to listen. Chastelâr looked around him well-pleased, and sang in a rich mellow voice the following stanzas after the model of his old instructor the celebrated Ronsard:—

'As an upland bare and sere,
In the waning of the year,
When the golden drops are withered off the broom ;
As a picture when the pride
Of its colouring hath died,
And faded like a phantom into gloom :

'As a night without a star,
Or a ship without a spar,
Or a mist that broods and gathers o'er the sea ;
As a court without a throne,
Or a ring without a stone,
Seems the widowed land of France bereft of thee.

'Our darling, pearl, and pride !
Our blossom, and our bride !
Wilt thou never gladden eyes of ours again ?
Would the waves might rise and drown
Barren Scotland and her crown,
So thou wert back with us in fair Touraine !'

Amidst the applause which followed the notes of their favourite, cloaks and swords were assumed, reckonings were discharged, farewells exchanged, and laughing light-hearted gallants streamed up the dark street in quest of their respective lodgings. Soon each was housed, and all was quiet ere the first streaks of dawn rose upon the sleeping town, and the cold bleak shore, and the dull waves of the brooding Channel.



CHAPTER II.

- ‘Farewell! Farewell! How soon ’tis said!
The wind is off the bay,
The sweeps are out, the sail is spread,
The galley gathers way.
- ‘Farewell! Farewell! The words how light!
Yet what can words say more?
Sad hearts are on the sea to-night,
And sadder on the shore.’
-



TWENTY-four hours had elapsed since Chastelâr sang his farewell song in the little auberge at Calais.

He now stood on the deck of a large galley, manned by a sturdy crew of rowers, whose efforts, however, were but little assisted by the light airs that blew off the shore. The ample sail would fill at intervals, and then flap idly against the mast. The measured stroke of the oars seemed on that wide expanse of water to have but little effect in propelling the labouring craft, and the companionship of a corresponding vessel at some quarter of a mile distance proceeding at the same rate, and in the same direction, neutralized all appearance of locomotion. A bright moon shone down upon the Channel, and the coast of

France still at no great distance, was distinctly visible in her light. Comparatively little way had been made since the galley's departure, nor did her course bear her in a direct line from the shore. The rowers also had flagged somewhat in their usual efforts. Rank upon rank, these brawny ruffians chained to their heavy oars were accustomed to labour doggedly, yet effectually, under the stimulus of the whip. To-night, however, a gentle voice had interceded even for the rude galley-slaves, and while they enjoyed this rare respite from over-exertion, many a foul lip that had long forgotten to form anything but curses, writhed itself into an unaccustomed blessing for the fair widowed Queen of France. Yes, what a strange companionship in that dark hull, having indeed nothing in common but the thin plank that was equally the hope of all! Down below, forcing her through the water, men who had almost lost the outward semblance of humanity, whose hearts were as black with crime as their bodies were disfigured with the hardships of their lot. Men whom their fellows had been forced to hunt like wild beasts out of the society of their kind, and to keep chained and guarded at an enforced labour worse than death; and seated on deck within ten paces of these convicts, a bevy of the fairest and gentlest of the human race, a knot of lovely maidens chosen for their birth, and beauty, and womanly accomplishments, to surround a mistress who was herself the most fascinating of them all, the very pearl of her sex, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.

Chastelâr, leaning against the mast, gazed aft upon the deck, and listened to the talk of Mary and her

maidens as they chatted together in the freedom of that unrestrained intercourse which the Stuarts have ever encouraged with their household. It was pleasant to hear the women's soft tones mingling with the splash of the water, and the flap of the empty sail, but there was one voice of which every note thrilled, even painfully, to the poet's heart.

Mary was reclining on a couch that had been prepared for her against the taffrail of the vessel. Though the tears were still wet upon her cheek, and a fresh burst was imminent every time she looked upon the coast, she could yet force herself to speak gaily, and strove to keep up the spirits of her maidens with that charm of manner, which never failed her at the very worst.

'And where is our Duenna?' said the Queen archly, 'I have scarce seen her since the hour we embarked, when she walked the deck with her head up and the port of an Admiral. D'Amville yonder, studying his charts as if he were in unknown seas, instead of the ditch that divides France from Britain, could scarce have looked more seamanlike.'

The young lady she addressed, a provoking specimen of the saucy style of beauty, with mischievous eyes, the whitest of teeth, and an exquisite little foot that was always conspicuous, laughed most unfeelingly in reply.

'Your Majesty should see her now,' she said. 'I shall never call her proud Mary Beton again. She is below, in the darkest corner of the cabin. She has buried her head in the cushions. She is ill. She is frightened, and her velvet dress is creased and tumbled, and stained all over with sea-water!'

‘ You cruel child,’ said the Queen, good-humouredly. ‘ Mary Seton, you are incorrigible. But we must send down to succour her, poor thing! Ah! it is only a heart-ache like mine that makes one insensible to all other sufferings. Mary Hamilton is too susceptible, she will be ill also; but you, Mary Carmichael, you have a kind disposition and a ready hand. You will not laugh in her face like this saucy girl here, go down and succour poor Beton. Give her our love—tell her she will yet be well enough to come and look her last with us on the dear land of France.’

The young lady whom she addressed, rose at once from her occupation, which like that of her mistress, seemed to consist in gazing stedfastly at the French coast, and with a graceful reverence to the Queen, departed on her errand of consolation. As she passed Mary Seton, the latter’s quick eye detected a few drops, it might be of spray, upon her cheek. The Maries could sympathize with their Queen’s regret in leaving a country that had been to them a pleasant home; and a woman’s sorrow, as we all know, while it is more easily cured, is also more easily excited, than that of the sterner sex. Mary Carmichael’s was not a disposition to give way to unavailing grief; above all, was one in which the instinct to conceal strong emotion predominated. With much kindness of heart and real good-nature, she was yet somewhat intolerant of weakness in herself and others. Brave and self-reliant, she could make small allowance for timidity or vacillation, even in her own sex, and had either mental or bodily pain been able to extort one exclamation of suffering from her lips, she would

have been bitterly ashamed of it a moment afterwards. To look on her clear blue eyes, her finely cut and regular features, her smooth brow, and determined mouth and chin, determined and uncompromising, despite of red lips, white teeth, and dimples, you would have decided that the one drawback to her attractions was the want of that yielding softness which is a woman's greatest charm. '*On aime ce qu'on protège,*' and the haughty beauty who humbles while she conquers, little guesses how a man's rude heart warms to the gentler suppliant, who clings to him, and trusts in him, and seems to say she has but '*him* in the world.' Masses of soft brown hair, and a rounded outline of form, feminine and symmetrical, somewhat redeemed Mary Carmichael's appearance from the charge of *hardness*. Altogether she gave the gallants of the French court the impression of a woman whom it would be difficult to like a *little*, and hazardous to like *much*. So what with the danger of her charms, and her own dignified and reserved demeanour, she had received less admiration than was due to the undoubted beauty of her face and figure.

While she goes below to succour her friend, who is suffering from sea-sickness, we will give some account of the four ladies of honour, commonly called the Maries, who waited on the Queen of Scots.

Mary Stuart herself, with all her predilections in favour of France, a country in which she spent the few tranquil years of her disturbed and sorrowful life, never suffered her connection with Scotland to be weakened or neglected. She kept up an active correspondence with her mother, Mary of Guise, who held

the reins of government with no inefficient hand in that country, till her death. Many of her household were Scotch. She showed especial favour to the Archer-guard, all of whom were of Scotch extraction, —favour, which over-estimated and misunderstood by their Captain, the heir of the house of Hamilton, was, perhaps, the original cause that ‘turned weak Arran’s brain.’ She gave such appointments in her household, as were nearest her person, to the Scotch nobility, and she chose for her own immediate attendants four young ladies of ancient Scottish families, whose qualifications were birth, beauty, and the possession of her own Christian name. ‘The Maries,’ as they were called, accordingly occupy a prominent position in the court history of the time, and as their number was always kept up to four, several of the oldest families in Scotland, such as the Setons, the Flemings, the Livingstones, &c., had the honour of furnishing recruits to the lovely body-guard. At the time of her embarkation for Leith, the Queen was accompanied by a very devoted *quartette*, as conspicuous for their personal attractions as for their loyalty to their Sovereign. It was even rumoured that the faithful maidens had bound themselves by a vow not to marry till their Queen did: be this, however, as it may, not one of them but might have chosen from the flower of the French court, had she been so disposed. Nay, gossips were found to affirm that many a warlike count and stately marquis would have been happy to take any one of the four! only too blest in the possession of a Mary, be she Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or Mary Hamilton.

A short sketch of each, at the commencement of our narrative may serve, perhaps, to prevent confusion, and to elucidate the actions of some of the humbler characters in our drama. We are of honest Bottom's opinion that it is best 'to call forth the actors generally according to the scrip. First say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.'

We will begin, then, with the eldest of the four,—the lady who with her head buried in cushions was groaning afresh at every lurch of the creaking galley, and who suffered despondently, refusing to be comforted.

To-day it is scarcely fair to bring her before the public. Yesterday she might have been seen to the greatest advantage, for Mary Beton was one of those people who seem to have been placed in the world for the express purpose of wearing full dress. The most romantic imagination could not have associated her with homely duties, *déshabille*, or dishevelled hair; and the Queen used to observe laughingly, that he must be a bold man who could venture to ask her hand for a galliard, and contemplate the possibility of disarranging a fold of her robe even in that state-liest of measures.

And yet she was handsome too, in a cold, unfeeling, haughty style. She had large handsome eyes, and a large handsome figure, and large handsome hands, which she loved to display. She was perfect in all matters of court *etiquette*, in which it was impossible to find her tripping, and would have died rather than 'bate one of the accustomed ceremonies with which she delighted to glorify her mistress and herself. When

she stood behind the throne with the Queen's gloves in her hand, she was the admiration of all chamberlains, grand carvers, seneschals, and such court officials, so unmoved and dignified was her bearing, so scrupulously rigid her demeanour, so completely did she sink the woman in the Maid-of-Honour. And her disposition corresponded with her lofty manners, and her fine, well-dressed form. Less unfeeling than careless of all matters that did not appertain directly or indirectly to the court, she neither seemed to seek nor to afford sympathy for the petty vexations and annoyances which a little *coterie* of women is pretty sure to find or create for itself. None of the Maries ever went to her for advice and assistance, only for instructions and commands. Though but little their senior, she was always considered and treated as a kind of lady-superior by the other three, and even the Queen used to call her jestingly The Duenna, and vowed that she never felt so unlike a Stuart as when after some trifling breach of court *etiquette*, she encountered the tacit rebuke of Mary Beton's grave cold eye.

If she *had* a weakness, it was ambition. If there was any one road that led to her heart, it must have been through the portals of a palace; along tapestried passages, between lines of bowing lackeys, with a gentleman-usher at each turning to point out the way. She wrapped herself in the folds of a majestic decorum, and paced along the journey of life gravely and disposedly, as if it were a minuet.

What a contrast to laughing, roguish, Mary Seton, that Will-o'-the-Wisp in petticoats, who flitted hither and thither amongst the courtiers, and pervaded every

apartment of the palace with the air of a spoilt child whom nobody ventured to thwart or to chide. White-headed statesmen, grave ambassadors ponderous in the double weight of their Sovereign's dignity and their personal appearance, iron-handed warriors and haughty cardinals, all acknowledged the influence of the bewitching little maid-of-honour; and it seemed that the most devoted of her slaves were those whose years and station afforded the strongest contrast to her own.

The Constable himself, the famous Montmorency, from whom the faintest gesture of approval could have lured every brave man in France willingly to death, would follow her about like a tame dog, and Cardinal Lorraine, churchman though he were, would have entrusted her with state secrets that he scarcely ventured to whisper to his own pillow. She might have done a deal of mischief if she had chosen, that lively, laughing little maiden. Fortunately she was thoroughly good-natured, so heedless that she forgot in the afternoon everything that was told her in the morning, and had, moreover, not the slightest taste for mystery or political intrigue. It would be difficult to say what was the especial charm people found in Mary Seton. Her features were irregular, and her figure, though exquisitely shaped, of the smallest. Dark eyes and eyelashes with a profusion of light hair gave a singular expression to the upper part of her face, whilst a mischievous smile, disclosing the pearliest of teeth, completed all the personal attractions of which she could boast. It was, indeed, one of those *haunting* faces which once seen, make an unaccountable impression, and which, if ever permitted to engrave themselves on

the heart, do so in lines that are not to be obliterated without considerable pain. There was something *piquante*, too, in her continual restlessness. Even here on shipboard she could not be still for five minutes together. She had already pervaded the whole vessel from stem to stern, above and below, nor was her curiosity satisfied till she had personally inspected the poor galley-slaves, returning to the Queen brim-full of the private history of the two or three greatest criminals amongst them, with which according to custom she had made herself familiar, ere she had been an hour on board. Her mistress, though in no merry mood, could not forbear being amused.

‘I believe,’ said she, ‘that you would rather work, chained to an oar like these poor wretches, than sit still.’

And Mary Seton replied demurely,

‘Indeed, madam, idleness is the parent of evil, and doubtless even at the galleys my good behaviour would soon raise me to be captain of the gang.’

A pair of dark eyes, that had hitherto been fixed on some object amidships, were raised, in wonder, to the laughing speaker, reproachful, as it were, of her levity at such a time, and Mary Hamilton’s beautiful face, paler and more beautiful than ever, in the moonlight, seemed to take a deeper shade of sadness as she resumed the occupation in which she had been interrupted with an unconscious sigh. Sitting at the Queen’s feet, she was ready, as usual, at the shortest notice, to fulfil her mistress’s wishes; but the latter remarked, with concern, that her favourite maid-of-honour had been silent for hours, and that the novelties incidental to their

situation had failed to rouse her from the abstraction in which, of late, she had been habitually plunged. It grieved the Queen's kind heart, for, though she loved the others dearly, perhaps she loved Mary Hamilton the best of all ; and it was no wonder. Beautiful as she was, with her large solemn eyes, and her black hair, framing the oval of a perfect face, pale and serene like an autumn evening, with her tall graceful figure, and womanly gestures, there was yet an indefinable charm about Mary Hamilton that seemed independent of all outward advantages ; as though she must still have been lovable, had she been old, ugly, and deformed.

It is a melancholy, nay, a morbid sentiment, which bids us feel, in all exceeding beauty, something akin to sorrow—and yet, who will deny the uncomfortable fact? Perhaps it arises from the longing after perfection which appertains to our immortality. Perhaps it is but the hopeless consciousness that our ideal can never be attained. At least the feeling exists, and in Mary Hamilton's beauty, doubtless, the melancholy element predominated. It did not make her the less beloved, we may be sure ; and the black-eyed maid-of-honour was worthy of the attachments she kindled wherever she was known. A kinder heart than hers never beat beneath a boddice. Wherever she heard of a sorrow, however trivial the cause, she was there to soothe. Utterly unselfish, she was ever ready to sacrifice her own will, her own amusements, her own advantage, to the lightest wish of another. And although the very sentinels at the palace-gate blessed her for her beauty, as she passed through, she seemed the only person about the Court who was insensible to her own at-

tractions. Gentle, yielding, trusting, and enthusiastic, here was a woman ready prepared and bound, as it were, for the sacrifice. Need we say the victim could not fail to be offered up?

Meanwhile, the galley strained and laboured on. The dripping oars fell with measured cadence on the water; but the land-breeze, dying away towards midnight, refused to second the efforts of the rowers, so that the distance from the French sea-board appeared scarcely to increase. The Queen evinced no intention of going to rest. Reclining on deck, she kept her eyes fixed on the cherished land she was so loth to leave, and inwardly longed for a storm, or any other contingency, that should drive them back into port, and give her a few more days' respite from her banishment.

Probably so unwilling a journey was never taken to claim a crown, and yet Mary was accompanied by many good friends, and true affectionate relatives, and loyal subjects, all anxious to see her securely established on the Scottish throne. Another galley of like tonnage accompanied her with a portion of her household, whilst two ships of war furnished an escort, by no means unnecessary, for Elizabeth's friendship was little to be relied on, and England, as usual, commanded the Channel with her fleet.

On board the Queen's own ship, d'Amville had taken the personal command, and studiously refrained from indulgence in the society of his charge, lest her fascinating conversation should have seduced him from his seamanlike duties. D'Amville, too, had long since yielded to the charm of that beautiful face, which only to look on was to love, and worshipped the Queen of

Scotland with a devotion as touching as it was chivalrous in its hopeless generosity. D'Amville, who sat now in the small dimly lighted cabin, with his charts before him, and pressed to his bosom the Cyprus silk handkerchief of which we have already heard—the one treasure prized by that loyal manly heart—the guerdon for which he gave up ambition, and comfort, and even hope. Truly there are strange bargains driven in love, reminding us of our traffic in beads, and brass, and tinsel, with naked savages. A few inches of silk, a half-worn glove, a thread of soft hair, in exchange for the noblest efforts of body and mind, the best years of life, perhaps the eternity of an immortal soul! Not that the coveted prize is reserved for such adoration. Alas! that it should be so. Rude hands pluck down the fruit that fond eyes have gazed on for so many sunny hours in vain, and the Sabine maiden loves her Roman bridegroom none the less that he carried her off by sheer force of manhood, not, perhaps, entirely so reluctant as she seemed.

Chastelâr had been standing motionless for a considerable period, leaning against the mast, apparently wrapped in meditation. At a signal from the Queen, however, his whole bearing altered; his face lighted up, and in an instant he was at her side. Mary Hamilton changed her position somewhat restlessly, and Mary Seton, rejoicing in the capture of a fresh listener, immediately took upon herself to communicate the commands of her mistress.

‘Fair sir,’ said the laughing maid-of-honour, ‘although you are certainly an ornamental object, measuring your stature yonder, against the mast, you will be more use-

ful here, at Her Majesty's feet, to give us some information as to the progress of our voyage. Doubtless you are in Monsieur d'Amville's confidence, who seems to think himself relieved of all care of us now he has got his unprotected charge fairly out to sea.'

'Hush! mad-cap,' said the Queen. 'And do you, Chastelâr, go below and enquire of our courteous Commander whether by to-morrow at day-break we shall, indeed, have lost sight of our beloved France. Already the beacon off the harbour is low down on the horizon, and the weather seems thickening to windward. Ah! the next lights we see will be on the bleak shores of Scotland. A dark, sad voyage, indeed, with a dreary termination.'

The poet bowed low and retired to fulfil the royal commands, whilst the Queen, leaning her white arms upon the bulwark, gazed longingly towards the shore. Tears coursed each other down her beautiful face as she murmured forth her unavailing sorrow in such broken sentences as these.

'France! France! my own beloved France! I shall never see you again. Country of my adoption! country of my love! Ah! it is sad to step at once, like this, from youth to age; it is cruel to feel still young and hopeful and capable of happiness, and to know that the bright days have departed from us for evermore. Poor Dido! you too gazed, in your agony, upon the sea, as I look ever towards the land, and your fond heart ached as mine aches now, and broke at last as mine, I feel, will break ere long. My ease is worse than yours; you had at least your home and country left, though you lost your Trojan love that the sea gave you and the sea took back again!'

Whilst she spoke she felt Mary Hamilton's cold lips pressed against her hand. The kind heart, alas! itself not wholly ignorant of sorrow, could not bear to witness the sufferings of its mistress. Her other maid-of-honour, however, took a livelier view of their position, and was not slow to express her dissent.

'Nay, madam,' said she, 'Dido gave up a throne for a bonfire, as I have heard your Majesty relate, whereas you are but losing sight of that faint beacon over yonder for the certainty of a crown. Besides, are there not Trojans in plenty where we are bound? What say you, Mary Hamilton, we need not look long for an Eneas a-piece, without counting those we take across with us? Listen, there is one of them singing even now.'

Mary Hamilton felt her face burning in the darkness though none could see her blush, and indeed, whilst her companion spoke, the Calais light sank beneath the black line of the horizon. As it disappeared, Chastelâr's mellow voice was heard, rising above the rush and ripple of the water and the jerk of the massive oars.

'What need have we of beacon sheen
To warn us or to save,
With the star-bright eyes of our lovely Queen
Guiding us o'er the wave?

'What need have we of a following tide?
What need of a smiling sky?
'Tis sunshine ev' at Mary's side,
And summer when she is by.

'Her glances, like the day-god's light,
On each and all are thrown;
Like him she shines, impartial, bright,
Unrivalled, and alone.

'Alone! alone! an ice-queen's lot,
Though dazzling on a throne;
Ah! better to love in the lowliest cot
Than pine in a palace—alone!

As he concluded, the singer approached Her Majesty with the information she had sent him to seek.

Softened by her sorrows, influenced by the time, the scene, the devotion of her follower, feeling now more than ever the value of such kind adherents, what could Mary do but reach him graciously the white hand that was not the least attractive of her peerless charms? And if Chastelâr pressed it to his lips with a fervour that partook more of the lover's worship than the subject's loyalty, what less was to be expected from an over-wrought imagination, and a susceptible heart, thus brought in contact with the most fascinating woman of the age? And the Queen drew away her hand hurriedly, rather than unkindly, with a consciousness not wholly displeasing, and Mary Seton looked discreetly into the far distance, as though there was something unusually interesting in that dull expanse of sea. And Mary Hamilton, clasping both hands tightly to her heart, leaned her head against the bulwark, and said nothing; but rose, as if intently relieved, when an increasing bustle on board the galley, and a general movement amongst its inmates, denoted some fresh alarm and the necessity for increased watchfulness and exertion.

It was even so. Their consort holding a parallel course at no great distance, had caught sight of the English cruizers, who, whatever might be their orders from 'good Queen Bess,' were as much mistrusted by

d'Elbœuf in his command of the Scottish Queen's little squadron, as by d'Amville who took her own galley under his especial charge. In those days the sea and land services were not so distinct as now.

Signals were exchanged between the two galleys to make all possible speed, and the slaves grateful for Mary's interposition on their behalf, laid to their oars with a will, in a manner that could never have been extorted from them by the lash. As there was but little wind, they soon increased their distance from the English men-of-war, who, however, came up with and captured one of the French ships containing the Earl of Eglinton and the Queen's favourite saddle horses. Mary herself nevertheless escaped their vigilance, and an increasing fog soon shrouded the little convoy from its pursuers.

Thus in darkness and danger, too ominous, alas! of her subsequent career, Mary Stuart sped on towards the coast of Scotland, leaving behind her the sunny plains of her beloved France, as she left behind her the bright days of her youth,—days that she seemed instinctively to feel were never to dawn for her again through the storms and clouds that brooded over the destinies of her future kingdom.



CHAPTER III.

‘Oh! ’gin I had a bonny ship,
And men to sail wi’ me,
It’s I wad gang to my true love,
Sin’ my love comes not to me.’

ABOUT the same hour at which the galley bearing Mary Stuart and her fortunes, eluded in the increasing darkness the vigilance of the English cruizers, an Archer of the Scottish Body-guard, with whom we have already made acquaintance might have been seen pacing to and fro on a strip of white sand adjoining Calais harbour. After a long day of labour and excitement, preparatory also to a ride of some two hundred miles on the morrow, this midnight walk was perhaps the least judicious method of passing the hours sensible persons devote to repose. Our Archer nevertheless continued it with a perseverance that denoted considerable pre-occupation, pausing at intervals to gaze wistfully on the sea, and anon resuming his exercise, as if goaded to bodily effort by some acute mental conflict.

In honest truth, like Sinbad the sailor, he was oppressed by a metaphorical Old Man of the Sea, that he could not get rid of, although in his case the unwel-

come equestrian had assumed the form of a prevailing idea, connected with a young woman instead of an old man, and resembling Sinbad's incumbrance in no particular except the tenacity with which it clung.

Reader it is worth while to go to the Pampas to see a Guacho lasso and mount a hitherto unbroken horse. How the animal, conscious of his degradation, fights and rears and plunges, wincing from the cruel spurs to rise at the maddening bit! How his eye dilates and his nostril reddens, and his whole form contracts with mingled fear and rage! Shaking his head wildly, he dashes ere long into a headlong gallop and becomes stupefied to discover that even at his fiercest speed he bears his tormentor along with him. Subdued at last, he bends his neck to the hand that has tamed him, and experiences a new sensation of increased power and confidence, in submitting to the master-will. So is it with a manly, resolute nature when it first feels the influence of another's existence on its own. There is a certain charm indeed in the novelty of the sentiment, but there is also surprise, apprehension, and a strong disposition to oppose and crush the unaccustomed usurpation. After many an unavailing struggle, the conquered must, however, submit to the conqueror, and like other slaves he loses the desire for liberty with the consciousness of incapacity to be free. Use in time renders him perfectly docile and broken-in; at last he is perfect in all the paces of the *manège*, and carries one rider nearly as pleasantly as another. He is a useful hack now, but the mettle of the wild-horse has left him for evermore.

Our Archer was in the first stages of his tuition.

He was, so to speak, only lately caught and mounted. We can but wish him a merciful rider with a kind heart and a light hand!

Walter Maxwell, for such was the name in which he stood enrolled on the list of the Archer-guard, was the younger son of an old Scottish family possessed of an unblemished pedigree, considerable territorial possessions and a sad lack of broad pieces. Then, as now, the upper classes in Scotland, with many noble qualities, were cursed with a morbid desire for the shadow rather than the substance of wealth. In Queen Mary's days the pound Scots represented in value the shilling English. In Queen Victoria's, the laird on one side the Tweed, with his few hundreds a year, would fain make believe that his possessions equal those of the squire on the other, who owns as many thousands. His difficulties, his short-comings, his meannesses originate in this, the paltriest of all ambition, that would make his shilling look like half-a-crown. Frugal and industrious as are her peasantry, prosperous and enterprising as are her yeomen and traders, probably the gentry of Scotland are at this moment more oppressed with difficulties than the parallel class in any other country under the sun.

In the time of which we write, the Scottish nobility were afflicted with the same unfortunate tendencies. There was then even more of display abroad and less of ease at home, whilst the unsettled state of the country compelling every baron to entertain as many feudal retainers as he could arm and feed, helped to drain their resources to the very dregs. Violence and intrigue, political as well as private, were

naturally resorted to by those who had no other means of replenishing their empty purses; and what with old feuds strictly entailed, and new differences perpetually arising, Scotland could only be likened to some huge caldron, in which a thousand different ingredients were boiling, and the scum perpetually rising to the surface.

In such a state of things there was not much provision for younger brothers; and as the somewhat heathenish doctrine, not yet eradicated, then prevailed of considering individuals simply as links in a line, and postponing all personal claims to those of that great myth, the family, it may easily be imagined that the younger sons of a noble Scotch house had small cause to congratulate themselves on their aristocratic lineage.

Walter Maxwell might consider himself fortunate that he had the shelter of the old tower at home until he had arrived at the strength and stature of a man—that he was permitted to feed at the same board, and enjoy the same pastimes as his elder brother, the heir—that he might follow to her grave with a son's decorous grief the mother who had doted on her youngest—and that his share of the family possessions was not limited to its name, but included a right to breathe the moorland air round the old place till he had attained his fifteenth year. Perhaps, after all, he inherited his share of the patrimony. He gained health and strength, and good manhood, on its broad acres. He learned to back a horse in its meadows, and fly a hawk on its hills, to swim in its dark loch, and to wield a blade within its walls. Perhaps, in bequeathing him an iron constitution, a

vigorous frame, and a courageous heart, the old lord had done enough for the golden-haired child who used to come running to him after supper and pull his grey moustaches, and climb merrily upon one knee, whilst the heir occupied the other.

At fifteen Walter Maxwell went out upon the world. A year after, he was the youngest gentleman-private in the French King's Archer-guard. Many a dame in Paris would turn round to look again on the blooming youthful face—almost a child's still—so pleasing in its contrast with that manly form, clad in the showy armour of the guard. The Duchess of Valentinois herself had desired to have the young boy-archer presented to her, and it is to be presumed that Diane de Poitiers, a lady of mature experience, was no mean judge of masculine attractions. A word from the woman he so adored was sufficient to interest Henry II. in the Scottish recruit, and Walter Maxwell was more than once selected for duties demanding discretion as well as fidelity and courage. All these qualities were indeed in constant request at such a court as that of the French King. At a more advanced age, the young soldier had also distinguished himself in the disastrous affairs of St. Quentin and Gravelines, where the French suffered serious defeats, and it was but the consistency with which he remained stedfast to the Protestant religion that stood in the way of his rapid promotion. He was a favourite too with his comrades for his courage and soldier-like bearing beyond his years, as well as for the indefinable attraction of those buoyant spirits which, like the bloom of youth on the cheek, seldom outlast maturity.

During the reign of Henry II., that chivalrous monarch, notwithstanding his severity to the Protestants, and the prevalence of their religion amongst his Scottish Archers, placed the most implicit confidence in his body-guard, rivetting their unshaken loyalty with many favours and immunities, till they walked the streets of the capital objects of admiration and envy to the very grandees themselves. Perhaps the warlike Henry was of opinion that a soldier's religion need not interfere with his obedience; and, indeed, too many of the Archers might have made the same answer, that some two centuries and a half later the old grenadier of the Empire gave on a question of doctrine to the Pope,—‘*Et de quelle religion es tu mon fils ?*’ asked his Holiness of the grim sentry who kept the door that led into the awful presence of Napoleon I. ‘*Je suis de la religion de la Vieille Garde,*’ replied the veteran, with an astounding clatter of his musket, as he ‘carried arms’ to the Pontiff. We take leave to doubt if the Protestantism of the Scotch Guard often stood in the way of Henry's commands to his favourites.

But the evil day dawned at last. In the pride of his manly beauty, and the vigour of his warlike frame, the King of France rode gallantly into the lists, to break a lance in sport for the bright eyes of his lady-love. On his helmet he wore the colours of Diane de Poitiers. And the Duchess herself looking down from the gallery, felt her heart leap with pride in the noble appearance of her royal lover. What shall we say of Henry's infatuation for this seductive woman, nearly twenty years his senior? Himself the husband of the most accomplished lady in Europe, for Catherine of Medicis was

notoriously as wise as she was beautiful? What, but that it is folly to argue on the wilfulness of the human heart, and that the most untoward and ill-advised attachments are apt to prove the strongest and the most fatal. The King loved her madly, and was not ashamed to avow his passion openly in the sight of France. Walter Maxwell attended the Sovereign as one of his squires, and bore a knot of the same coloured ribbons on his bonnet.

And now the trumpet sounds a flourish, and the King raising his vizor, calls for a bowl of wine, and without dismounting, quaffs it with an ill-concealed gesture of courtesy to some one in the gallery—then, a perfect horseman, he backs his charger to his post. Opposite, like a statue sheathed in steel, sits his antagonist, the captain of the Archer-guard. A proud man to-day is Gabriel, Earl of Montgomery, for the Scottish peer has been chosen to break a lance with the French King, in presence of two royal brides and their bridegrooms! There is a hush of pleased expectation and interest over the whole assembly; only the Duchess of Valentinois turns pale with ill-defined apprehension. She feels the value of her last love, wildest and dearest of all, lawless though it be. It was but this morning the King told her in jest, he should not close his vizor lest she might not recognise him; and she had chidden him half playfully, half in earnest for the insinuation. She would know that warlike form she thinks in any disguise—and the colour mounts again to her face as she catches his last glance, while he settles himself in the saddle, and lays his lance in the rest. He has not closed his helmet after all! She

will chide him seriously, though, to-night, for his selfish carelessness of danger. Again the trumpet sounds, and the lances shiver fairly in mid-career. Firm and erect, the King reaches the opposite extremity of the lists; then, swaying heavily in the saddle, falls in his ringing harness to the ground. The Queen and her ladies rush tumultuously into the lists. Catherine de Medicis has a *right* to succour her husband. Diane de Poitiers, sick and faint, loses her consciousness in a swoon. She is scarcely noticed, for all are crowding round the King.

Alas for the gallant monarch! Alas for the bold man-at-arms! A splinter from Montgomery's lance has entered the eye through the unclosed helmet, and penetrated nearly to the brain. Ere twelve days elapse, Catherine de Medicis is a widow, Francis II. has succeeded to the throne, and Mary Stuart is Queen of France.

The favour of the Duchess of Valentinois was no passport, we may fairly suppose, to the good graces of the Queen-Mother; and although Walter Maxwell retained his appointment in the guard, his hopes of advancement perished with the death of his royal patron. Such disappointments, however, though they press heavily on an enthusiastic spirit, are lightly borne by such a temperament as Maxwell's. His disposition was naturally calm and unimpressionable beyond the average. He possessed the rare quality of seeing things as they were, and not as he wished them to be. Above all, he had that quiet confidence in himself which could wait patiently for an occasion, and seize it without hurry or agitation when it arrived. Moreover, he had been brought up in the stern school

that turns out the most finished pupils after all. Poverty and hardship give their lessons for nothing, but men remember them better than Latin and Greek. We may be allowed to doubt whether all George Buchanan's classic lore and pedantic periods were as well worth acquiring as Maxwell's aptitude to saddle, shoe, and groom his own horse, cook his own ration, burnish his own corslet, and keep his head with his hand.

Changes also took place in the Scottish Guard. The Earl of Arran, heir to the house of Hamilton, was appointed to its command, and already that eccentricity began to manifest itself which was fostered, at last, into madness, by the sunshine of Mary's unconscious smiles. Arran chose to alter the discipline, the accoutrements, and the whole system of the corps, and such interference with their old habits was by no means relished by its members. During the short reign of Francis II. Mary Stuart's sympathies with her countrymen, and knowledge of their customs and prejudices, checked many a proposed innovation that would have created open dissatisfaction; but when she became a dowager Queen, and Charles IX. succeeded to the throne, the Archers found themselves curtailed of many of their privileges and no longer looked upon as what they considered themselves—the *élite* of the French army. Seeing, however, that, like the famous '*gants glacés*' of a later period, they had earned this position by constantly volunteering for all dangerous duties, they might well be uneasy at the prospect of forfeiting a distinction it had cost so much hard fighting to attain.

It was during the short eighteen months of Mary's

reign as Queen of France, that our Archer, in virtue of his office, was brought in contact with the fascinating sovereign and her court. That he became the devoted adherent of his royal countrywoman is not to be wondered at; but in Maxwell's consistent loyalty to the Stuart there lurked a deeper feeling of interest than he liked to allow even to himself; an interest that he could not but connect with another Mary attached to the person of her mistress. The Queen, as is well known, was a daring and skilful horsewoman, a masculine accomplishment, by the way, that many womanly natures acquire with great ease. Perhaps as its chief art consists in ruling by judicious concession, they have learned half the lesson before they get into the saddle. As a natural consequence, Mary was passionately fond of the chase, and followed it with a degree of recklessness somewhat discomfiting to her less courageous or worse-mounted attendants. In fact she sustained more than one severe fall without its curing her in the least of her galloping propensities.

It fell out on one occasion, near the Castle of Chambord, whither the court had repaired for this princely recreation, that our Archer was in attendance on Mary and her *suite* at the moment the stag was unharboured, and, with a burst of inspiriting music, the hounds were laid on. The Queen, as was her custom, went off at a gallop, outstripping her attendants, and followed, at unequal distances by the whole cavalcade. Walter Maxwell, on a clambering, Roman-nosed French horse, was plying his spurs to keep within sight of the chase, when a faint scream of distress and a young lady borne past him at a pace that showed she was run away with,

diverted his attention from the pleasures to the exigencies of the moment. Though the animal beneath him was neither speedy nor active, he managed, by a skilful turn, to reach her bridle rein, and so guiding her impetuous horse into an alley that diverged from the line of the chase, succeeded in stopping him before his own was completely exhausted. While the young lady did not, in the least, lose her presence of mind, she was, naturally, a little discomposed and a good deal out of breath. Nevertheless, she thanked her preserver with frank and graceful courtesy, avowing, at the same time, in very broken sentences, her inability to control the animal she rode.

The confession was tantamount to a request that her new friend would not leave her. The most determined Nimrod could scarcely have abandoned a lady who thus placed herself under his charge, and Walter Maxwell, with his passionless exterior, had a good deal of that manly generosity in his composition, which warms at once to the unprotected and the weak. Instead of toiling after the whole company, then, on a tired horse, behold him riding quietly through beautiful woods, by the side of a young lady whose peace of mind seemed to depend on his keeping his hand on her bridle rein.

People soon become acquainted when thus associated. Mary Carmichael, with a colour much heightened from a variety of causes, and her rich brown hair disordered by her gallop, had never looked prettier in her life; whilst a glance or two shot at her protector from under her riding-hat satisfied her that he was a gentleman of good nurture and lineage, also that she had remarked

him more than once before, when fulfilling his duties as a guardsman about the court. Before they had ridden a mile he had told her his name and all about himself.

‘A Maxwell!’ exclaimed the young lady, whose apprehensions were by this time considerably soothed. ‘I ought to have known you for a Maxwell at once. You’ve got the frank brow and the ready hand, and the silent tongue of the Maxwells;’ here she checked herself with a laugh and blush, whereat her companion laughed and coloured a little too. ‘Why, we are kinsfolk at that rate,’ she added courteously. ‘My mother’s niece married a Maxwell of the Den, and they are a branch of the Terreagles Maxwells, and so are you.’

‘I have left home so long,’ answered Walter gravely, ‘I cannot count my kin; and yet I will take your word for it. I should think the better of myself,’ he added with a smile, ‘to have a right to call you cousin.’

The Archer rarely smiled; when he did, his usually stern features softened and lighted up almost into beauty. The change was not unmarked by the maid-of-honour.

‘A Carmichael never failed a kinsman,’ said she, and her voice shook a little, while her soft eyes gleamed; — ‘or the old tower would be looking down still upon Dumfries, and there would be more than a blackened arch, and a few mounds of grass standing by the hearth-stone, where my father once received King James. Well, Sir Archer, you have done a cousinly deed for me at least to-day.’

Perhaps she expected he would make some acknowledgment of his good fortune in the opportunity, but

Maxwell rode on in silence. A French gallant would have overwhelmed her with eloquence, and few men but would have hazarded a few compliments, however trifling. She scarcely seemed offended, nevertheless. Her mute companion was absorbed in a brown study, thinking how well she looked in her riding-gear. It may be that her woman's intuition told her as much.

Presently a burst of horns in the distance announced the direction of the chase. Mary Carmichael's steed pricked his ears, and showed symptoms of insubordination once more. Walter's grasp was on the bridle in an instant, and the rider thanked him with a grateful smile.

'The ready hand!' she said, laughing. 'Was I not right in saying you inherited the gifts of your family?'

'It must excuse the silent tongue,' he answered. 'I am no squire of dames, and you ladies of the court must needs look down on the unpolished soldier. And yet his silence may offer more of respect and regard in its humility than the loudest professions of admiration from those who have never been taught to say less than they think, and think less than they feel.'

'And receive twice as much in return,' she replied in a very low voice, and averting her face from her companion as she spoke. Then she put her horse into a quicker pace, and ere long they met and joined a party of the courtiers returning from the chase.

After this, though they saw each other but seldom, and had no more rides together, there was a sort of tacit understanding between the two. Nobody remarked that if Walter Maxwell was on guard, Mary Car-

michael's manner displayed more animation, and her dress was, if possible, more becomingly arranged than usual. Nobody remarked that one of the Archers, more than any of his comrades, displayed unusual readiness in volunteering for all duties that brought him near the Queen's person, and never seemed so contented as when riding in her escort, or mounting guard at her door. Yet it was true, notwithstanding; and, although not a word had been exchanged by these young persons of a more explicit tendency than those we have related, there had yet sprung up between them one of those mysterious affinities, that in this world of ours, lead to such troublesome results.

It was not till Mary Carmichael had sailed for Scotland in the *suite* of her royal mistress, that it occurred to Maxwell he was losing time and opportunities by remaining in his present service at the court of France. He wondered it had never before struck him so forcibly that the Archer-guard no longer occupied its proud position in the land of its adoption—that its privates were no longer so well born, its drill so exact, nor its discipline so perfect as in the days of its old commander, Montgomery—that Arran was a weak-minded enthusiast, who would finish by disgusting both officers and men; and that Charles IX. was already beginning to look coldly upon them, and depriving them, one by one, of the privileges by which they set such store. Then his patron, Montmorency, was getting infirm and worn-out; and with the Constable's demise, adieu to his hopes of advancement in the service of France!

Mary Stuart, too, in her new kingdom, would need all the stout hands and loyal hearts that she could

muster. It was clearly the duty of every Scotchman to rally round the fair young Queen.

Ere our Archer had concluded his midnight walk, he had made up his mind ; and as he posted back his long ride to Paris the following day, he resolved to claim his dismissal from the French King, and to seek his fortune once more in the land of his birth.



CHAPTER IV.

‘We are the boys that can wrestle and ride,
Empty a saddle, and empty a can,
Keeping the rights of the border-side,
Warden to warden, and man to man;
Never another so welcome here
As the lads of the snaffle, spur, and spear’

AT the time of which we write, there were few worse places wherein to be benighted than that wild district on the borders of England and Scotland, appropriately called the ‘Debateable Land.’ Bleak and barren on a gusty evening late in autumn, a less desirable locality for the traveller could scarcely be imagined, and he must have been a hardy adventurer who would not have preferred the dirtiest corner of the smokiest hostelry, to the uncertain track that led through its morasses, especially on a tired horse. Such was the reflection uppermost in Walter Maxwell’s mind, as he marked the dusky horizon becoming more and more indistinct, and calculated the diminishing chances of his reaching the Castle of Hermitage, where he had hoped to find rest and refreshment with his kinsman, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, and doubtless, in that country where horses were

so easily come by, a fresh mount to take him northward on the morrow. No longer an Archer of the Scottish Guard, Maxwell was on his way to Edinburgh from the English sea-port at which he had landed in returning from France. With his reputation as a soldier and his family connexions, he had little doubt but that he would be welcome at Holyrood, and indeed had it been otherwise, an indefinable attraction that he would not have confessed, seemed to draw him irresistibly towards the Scottish capital.

During the whole of his journey, however, by land and sea, his destination had never seemed so remote, nor the likelihood of his reaching it so small, as at present.

‘Hold up! you brute!’ said Maxwell, as he felt if the straps of his corslet were secure and his sword loose in its sheath, whilst his poor horse took that opportunity of floundering on its head.

‘Hold up! if you fall you’ll never get up again, and unless mine host’s directions were inspired by beer and brandy, we must be a good way off Hermitage yet. Happily the moon is rising every minute. Well, you were a good beast this morning, though you’re not worth your four shoes now!’

While he spokē he patted the poor animal on the neck, and as if encouraged by the caress, it pricked its ears and mended its pace of its own accord.

Maxwell was too old a soldier not to be on the alert in such a situation: it was with a feeling more of annoyance than surprise that he heard the tramp of horses advancing at a rapid pace over the soulder sward he had left behind him; and whilst he shortened

his reins, and hitched his sword-belt to the front, it was but with a dogged consciousness that, though he meant to fight to the last, he was sure to get the worst of it, out-numbered, and on a tired horse.

He had, however, the caution to halt on the far side of some broken and boggy ground, so that the new comers, whom he now made out to be but two, must attack him at a disadvantage if they intended violence, and he thought how he could best separate them, that they might not both set on him at once.

The horsemen, however, halted immediately they caught sight of him, and the foremost called out in a loud frank voice, undoubtedly English in its tone,

‘Is it friend or foe? A man must be one or other, in the Debateable Land!’

‘Friend!’ answered Maxwell confidently, adding, as an earnest of his sincerity, ‘Keep near the big stone, or you’ll go in up to your girths!’

Following his advice the horseman and his attendant, who appeared nothing more than a simple domestic, emerged upon sound ground. The former was admirably mounted, and although his dress denoted the gentleman rather than the soldier, he sat his horse with the ease of a skilful cavalier.

Maxwell made out also in the moonlight that he was perfectly armed, wearing both pistols and rapier, and carried a small valise, with somewhat ostentatious care, on the saddle in front of him.

‘Friend!’ he repeated bowing ceremoniously as he brought his horse alongside Maxwell’s, ‘foes are more plentiful in this district on a moonlight night. We may meet some gentlemen hereabouts, who would give

us anything but a "Highland welcome." As we are going in the same direction, by your good leave we will travel together—union is strength; although,' he added, glancing at the other's tired horse, 'haste is not speed.'

His manner was courtly, or rather courtier-like, in the extreme, and Maxwell saw at a glance he had to do with one of the porcelain vessels of the earth; yet there was a conventional tone of indifference, a something of covert sarcasm, and implied superiority in his voice, that jarred upon the franker nature of the soldier.

They rode on, however, amicably together, the attendant, a burly Southron, apparently by no means easy either in mind or body, keeping close behind his master. The latter was bound, he said, for Hermitage, which he hoped to reach before midnight, and he seemed to treat his new companion with a shade more deference, when he learned that Maxwell was a kinsman of the redoubted Earl of Bothwell.

Some men have a knack of extracting information without affording any in return, and this faculty appeared to be largely possessed by the well-mounted traveller, who, while he conversed with the ease and freedom of a thorough man of the world, dropped every now and then a leading question that denoted an insatiable and unscrupulous curiosity.

The Scotch have generally an insurmountable dislike to being 'pumped,' and Maxwell, whose shrewdness soon perceived his new friend's intention of subjecting him to that process, resented it by an increased reserve which subsided ere long into an almost unbroken silence.

They rode on for some time accordingly, interchanging only an occasional remark, the stranger accommodating his horse's pace to that of his new acquaintance, whilst his servant jogged painfully along behind him, suffering obviously from abrasion, the curse of unpractised riders, and seeking relief as well by sighs and groans as by fruitless changes of position in the saddle. The moon shone out brightly, and its light enabled Maxwell to examine the face and figure of his comrade.

He was a spare man, of less than middle age, with the marks of good-breeding apparent in his thin, sharp features, and small feet and hands. His figure, though too angular, was sufficiently graceful; and his face, though pale, bore the clear hue of a healthy and enduring constitution. Altogether he would have been a well-looking man enough, but for the restless expression of his small grey eyes, which peered from under the straight thick eyebrows with a vigilance amounting to suspicion; and the thin firmly-compressed lips, a little drawn in at the corners, as if by an habitual sneer.

Maxwell, accustomed in his warlike life to judge of men at a glance, found himself vaguely speculating on an exterior beyond which he could not penetrate. The shaven lip and cheek denoted a man of peaceful profession; but the finished horsemanship, the hanging of the sword, the readiness with which his hand sought his pistol-holsters, savoured of the soldier. Again, his thoughtful brow and worn face might well become some distinguished scholar or man of science; but the tone of his conversation, and the levity of his bearing, contra-

dicted the supposition that he could belong to the 'wise ones of the earth.' He seemed conscious, too, of his new friend's observation, and more inclined to court than shrink from it, as if priding himself on the impenetrable reserve, with which he could combine an appearance of extreme cordiality. The restless eyes, however, were not still for an instant; and the soldier, in the midst of his speculations, was equally startled and shamed by the observation which aroused him, and proved that the civilian's vigilance had been far more active than his own.

'I thought so!' said the latter, speaking in quiet rapid tones. 'There are night-hawks abroad, as usual, in this cursed wilderness. Did you not see the glitter of a head-piece over the height yonder? Now, if these are jackmen out on their own account, you and I will have to trust to the speed of our horses, which is doubtful, and our knowledge of the locality, which is negative; this poor devil will have his throat cut to a certainty.'

Even at this disagreeable juncture, the man spoke in a bantering tone, as it were between jest and earnest. His servant, a stout able-bodied fellow enough, regarded his master with a ludicrous expression of dismay.

'Your horse is fresh, and looks like a good one,' answered Maxwell, somewhat contemptuously; 'keep round the shoulder of that hill, and you will find a beaten track that leads to Hermitage. At least, so they directed me. Mine is tired: I *can't* run, so I *must* fight. If I arrive not by daybreak, you will know what has become of me, and can tell the Warden he should keep better order on the Marches.'

The other laughed outright.

'A sharp pair of spurs are no bad weapons on occasion,'

said he; 'but I am much afraid I must trust to other friends to-night.' He laid his hand on his holsters, and continued, 'those fellows will come in again in front of us, and I had rather face every outlaw in Britain, from Robin Hood downwards, than turn back into the wilderness. Let us halt for a minute. I can hear the tramp of their horses even now.'

As the three drew up under the shadow of some rising ground, they could distinctly hear the gallop of horses and the clatter of arms on the other side of the acclivity.

'There are half-a-score, at least,' observed Maxwell, with increasing animation. 'You are quite right—they want to intercept us in the pass yonder. What say you, sir? Shall we pay them in steel or silver? for metal they will have. Can your servant fight?'

'Like a devil,' answered the other, 'when it is impossible to run away; and faith, he'll be between two fires to-night, for I can hear a body of horse in our rear as well. What say you, Jenkin? Had you not rather be lying drunk in the filthiest gutter in Eastcheap than make your bed here on the heather, with a rough-footed borderer to pull your boots off, and an Armstrong's lance through your body to make you sleep well?'

The man gave a sulky grunt in answer. He was evidently irritated at the heartless levity of his master, but he looked all the more dogged and resolute, and seemed likely to fight to the last. The night wind, too, bore on their ears the tramp of a body of horse behind them, and it was simply a question whether it were not better to charge through those in front, and take their chance.

After a hurried consultation, they agreed to ride

steadily forward to the pass, at a good round pace, yet not fast enough to convey the idea of flight. If their enemies were there before them, they must charge without hesitation, and try to cut their way through, the Englishman remarking with grim sarcasm, that 'the Warden was likely to have a good appetite if he waited supper until his guests arrived.'

As the three wayfarers neared the pass, the dusky forms of their enemies were already drawn up in its shadow, and a shot fired at Maxwell, which cut the ribbon from his sleeve, sufficiently denoted their intentions. A voice, too, from the midst of the little black mass was heard to exclaim, in more polished language than might have been expected,

'Dead or alive, Rough Rob! take the man in the centre, and let the others go free!'

'Thank you,' observed the Englishman who occupied that position between his servant and Maxwell, adding through his set teeth, 'I shall owe you one, whoever you are, and pay it before I've done with you, or my name is not Thomas Randolph!'

Maxwell heard the promise, but had no time for astonishment at thus finding himself the companion of Elizabeth's ambassador to the Scotch court, under such uncomfortable circumstances, inasmuch as a grim borderer, on a tall bay horse, was already within lance's length of him, and in another stride, his own tired animal was rolling on the heather, and he was defending himself as well as he could on his feet.

Two or three shots were fired, the flashes from the pistols and muskets lighting up the faces of the combatants, as they rode to and fro through the

skirmish. With the exception, however, of Mr. Randolph's first shot, which made 'Rough Rob's' good grey mare masterless, the fire-arms did little damage, save rendering three or four of the horses perfectly unmanageable.

As Maxwell shifted his ground, and traversed here and there, parrying with his sword the thrusts of his adversary's long lance, a tall man rode up to him, and shouting, 'a Carmichael!' seemed about to cut him down; then, as if perceiving his mistake, he checked his raised arm, and turned upon Mr. Randolph, whom he attacked with considerable energy, shouting his war-cry, as though from the force of habit, once more.

The latter defended himself valiantly, but notwithstanding the assistance of his servant, who fought with the cool intrepidity of an Englishman in a difficulty, he had too great odds to contend with, and must have fared badly had not assistance come from an unexpected quarter at the very moment when honest Jenkin fell from the saddle with an awkward knock on his pate from the back of a Jedwood axe, running his assailant through the arm, however, as he went down.

Mr. Randolph's bridle had already been seized, and the valise torn from his saddle by the tall man who seemed to command the party. Both Maxwell and the Ambassador were now surrounded and nearly overpowered, when two more horsemen, followed by a numerous troop of cavalry, came galloping up from the rear, and charged into the *mêlée* with a violence that made a clean breach through the outlaws. One of them, a gigantic borderer, with a broad good-humoured face, rolled Maxwell's antagonist, horse and

man, to the ground, knocking the rider down again with the butt-end of his lance when he strove to rise; whilst the other, a tall cavalier magnificently accoutred, turned Mr. Randolph's horse courteously out of the press, dealing one of his assailants a buffet that must have cut him in two, had it not been mercifully delivered with the flat of the sword, and rebuking the others in a voice of authority that all seemed to recognise. Indeed, a cry of 'the Warden! the Warden!' was by this time passed from lip to lip amongst the outlaws, and horses' heads were already turned, and spurs plied to seek safety in flight. For the third time, too, to-night, Maxwell heard the name spoken which kindled so many recollections in his breast. Disembarrassed of his enemies by the rescue that arrived so opportunely, he noticed the Warden ride rapidly up to the leader of the band, and say in a low voice, 'You here, Carmichael! for shame!' after which, the other turned rein, and galloped off at the utmost speed, accompanied by all his followers save two, one of whom was dead, and the other disabled. It struck him also that the pursuit was not nearly so vigorous as might have been expected from the rescue, and that the Warden appeared far more anxious to pay every attention to Mr. Randolph than to take vengeance on those who had attacked him. The latter had never lost his *sang froid* during the encounter, and was, if possible, more self-possessed than usual at its termination.

'Your Scottish welcomes, my Lord Earl,' said he, 'are hearty, though rough. I never was more glad to see your lordship. It is fortunate for us all, except this gentleman, whose acquaintance I regret to have

made so inopportunately, that you came to-night somewhat further than the drawbridge to meet your guests.' As he spoke, he pointed to the dead body of 'Rough Rob,' which was lying at his horse's feet.

'Who is it?' asked Bothwell of his henchman anxiously, ere he replied to the courtier; and the gigantic horseman who had rescued Maxwell, dismounting, turned the dead man's face to the moonlight.

'It is but "Rough Rob,"' replied he carelessly, after a brief examination of the corpse. 'A likely lad, too, though he was a kinsman of my ain. Aye, Rob, thou'rt out of the saddle at last man; but I would like weel to ken wha's gotten the gude grey mare.'

'Secure the other rascal,' said the Warden, turning his horse's head homeward. 'Let Dick Rutherford and two more jackmen, bring him on in the rear. Help Mr. Maxwell to his horse, some of you, and leave that carrion to the crows.'

The cavalcade was now set in motion, Bothwell and Mr. Randolph riding together in front; the former, after a hasty greeting to his kinsman, appearing to devote his whole attention to the Ambassador. Maxwell, whose relationship to the Warden made him an object of interest to the jackmen, came on in the rear at a slower pace, for his horse was now completely exhausted. He was, however, accompanied by the borderer who had rescued him, and who seemed to have taken a great fancy to him for his swordsmanship.

Dick Rutherford, or as he was more commonly called 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh,' set much store by that cool courage which he himself possessed in no common

degree ; and as he looked on every hand-to-hand encounter in the light of a pastime at which he was himself a first-rate performer, so he could never withhold a certain amount of facetious approbation from any other skilful player at the game. He was, at this period, the Warden's henchman or principal man-at-arms, and would have followed his chief to the death, for Bothwell had the knack of winning the hearts of his retainers by a rude cordiality and boisterous frankness akin to their own.

The Warden could drain a deeper cup, back a wilder horse, and couch a heavier spear than the rudest of his jackmen ; his fine manly person, great strength, and soldier-like bearing, fascinated while they controlled these savage natures ; and whatever deep designs may have lurked beneath this frank exterior, James Hepburn seemed to have no ambition beyond the reputation of being the boldest borderer on the Marches. He would ride alone, or attended only by 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh,' through the worst of these lawless districts, and the latter was never tired of detailing the hand-to-hand encounters with freebooters, in which the Warden had come off victorious. Dick, too, was an adept in all the intricacies of his profession. He could follow a trail like a blood-hound, fight like a demon, and drink and ride like—a borderer. With all this his great strong body contained a soft heart, and an inexhaustible fund of good humour.

After looking at Maxwell in silent admiration for a space of five minutes, he began—

'I would ha' wagered a hundred merks now that there wasna a man in Scotland could ha' kept little

Jock Elliott at half-sword like that; and he on his white-footed gelding with his long lance in his hand. Jock will no' hear the last o'it from me in a hurry. I trow he's found his match o' this side Teviot-dale, brag how he may!

'You know him then?' asked Maxwell, somewhat surprised to discover such an intimate acquaintance with an outlaw on the part of the Warden's henchman.

'Know him!' repeated the other, 'he broke my head at Bewcastle market only yesterday was three weeks; but I'm thinking I'm even with ye now, Jock my man! All in good part though,' he added, 'for little Jock Elliott's a canny lad, and a far-off cousin o' my ain.'

'*Little* Jock Elliott!' observed Maxwell, in return. 'Why he looked to me nearly as big a man as yourself.'

'It's a name he got when a boy,' answered the borderer, 'to know him from his brother, big Jock Elliott, that's gone to his rest. Ye see they were all Elliotts and Armstrongs that were in the slack* the night, *forbye* "Rough Rob," and he was a Rutherford, more shame till him that let himself get guided that way by a Southron!'

'I heard another name too,' said Maxwell, whose curiosity was thoroughly aroused. 'Who was the tall man that seemed to be the leader of the party? the man that rode by me just before you struck in so opportunely, and shouted, "a Carmichael" when he drew his sword.'

'Oh! it would just be one o' the Carmichaels that

* The pass.

happened there by chance,' replied Dick, with an expression of hopeless stolidity overspreading his broad countenance; and Maxwell, seeing it would be useless to question him further on that subject, turned the conversation to the more congenial topics of horses and weapons, and the advantages and disadvantages of the new-fashioned musketoon. In this manner they journeyed on in rear of the party till the dark towers of Hermitage loomed against the midnight sky, and the clatter of the draw-bridge, as it was lowered, together with a considerable bustle inside the walls, announced that preparations were being made for their entrance.

Bothwell and Randolph, who had been riding at the head of the party, halted at the postern until the rest came up, and the former proceeded to muster his troop once more ere they crossed the bridge. Maxwell remarked that the prisoner had escaped, but as no one else seemed to take any notice of the circumstance, he discreetly held his tongue. Whilst the gates were being opened, and the draw-bridge secured, operations which occupied a considerable time, Bothwell welcomed his guests formally to his 'poor tower,' addressing himself, as before, more particularly to Randolph.

'I regret much,' said he to the latter, 'that your duty compels you to be in the saddle again to-morrow at day-break; but he who serves a Queen, as well I know, must never flag for an hour in his zeal. It shall be my care to provide you with a proper escort, and my own henchman shall accompany you to Edinburgh.'

Randolph thanked the Warden courteously.

‘Your kinsman,’ said he, ‘will, perhaps, accompany me. He, too, as he tells me, has urgent affairs in the capital, and I could not wish a stouter escort if I carried a king’s ransom along with me.’

Maxwell accepted the offer eagerly, notwithstanding the Earl’s hospitable objections; and Bothwell, as they turned to cross the draw-bridge, once more expressed his sorrow that the English Ambassador should have been attacked within his jurisdiction.

‘I must take yet stricter order with these knaves,’ said the Warden; ‘there are too many broken men still in the Debateable Land who get their living by what they can lift. Your valise is gone, but that we can easily replace. I fear, however, that it contained something more valuable than wearing apparel. Despatches probably for the Queen, and—and—Lord James, Her Majesty’s half-brother?’

Mr. Randolph could not repress a sneer.

‘Certain letters,’ he answered, ‘indeed there were, of no great value to those knaves, if, as your lordship seems satisfied, they are illiterate freebooters who cannot read. I have a few more here,’ he added, pointing to a packet that peeped from his boot; ‘and, indeed the only one of importance is written in a cypher with which I am myself unacquainted. Your lordship need not, therefore, be uneasy about the safety of my despatches.’

Bothwell looked considerably put out, though he strove to mask his annoyance under an affectation of great cordiality; and Randolph, as he followed him into the castle, seemed hugely to enjoy the discomfiture of his host.



CHAPTER V.

'She could whisper, and smile, and sigh,
Pleading, flattering, . . . so can the rest;
But oh! the light in her roving eye
Would have wiled the babe from its mother's breast.'



THE Queen of Scotland was fairly settled in her own palace of Holyrood. We must now shift the scene to the royal presence-chamber in that picturesque old building. It is a lofty and well-proportioned apartment, of which, however, the small windows and thick walls denote that it was originally constructed with a view to purposes of defence. It is hung round with a quaint and elaborate tapestry, more curious, perhaps, than tasteful, representing various incidents in the heathenish history of Diana; whereon the goddess bares her knee and draws her bow, to the discomfiture of her rival's children, with mythological effrontery. Beautiful oak carvings adorn its massive chimney-piece, and its panelled roof is richly emblazoned with the armorial bearings of a line of kings. The floor, instead of being strewed with rushes, is carefully waxed and polished, a foreign innovation which has already excited some displeasure amongst the graver courtiers. Such furniture as the room contains is heavily gilt and decorated. The sovereign's chair of

state seems to blaze with embroidery and cloth of gold. It is a right royal apartment, not unworthy of the company by which it is occupied.

To-night the Queen holds one of her state-receptions, and around her person are gathered the flower of the Scottish aristocracy. Many a bold baron who spends half his life sheathed in armour, walks none the less stately to-night that he has donned satin doublet and silken hose, that his brow is bare of its steel head-piece, and he carries his plumed bonnet in his hand. Many a dame of clear blue eye and dazzling fairness scans with critical glance every fold of the royal drapery, and watches if she cannot catch and appropriate another grace from her Queen. They are thronging round her now, for the dissensions which shall mar her unhappy reign are as yet only in the bud. Each may expect some fresh boon from a new sovereign, and the baron's ambition to become an earl is just as eager, and probably twice as unprincipled, as the varlet's to become a page, or the page's to become a squire. Even thoughtful Lord James, the Queen's half-brother, the lay-churchman, the soldier-statesman, the staff on which she leans, little dreaming it can ever break in her hand and pierce her to the quick, has forgotten his sister in his sovereign, and wears on his calm sad face an unusual expression of deference to-night, because of prospective advancement and his promised earldom of Mar, and the broad lands and additional title of Moray, to which he hopes it may lead. He has taken his stand on the right of the Queen's chair, and Mary whispers to him ever and anon as she requires information concerning her new subjects; although, with the tact of

her family and her own kindly acuteness, she has already mastered the names of most of them, and has even gained the good-will of more than one rugged baron by a happy question regarding his old grey tower or his favourite horse.

But amongst many eager countenances, of which, with all their different expressions, each wears a family likeness of curiosity and expectation, it is touching to observe the chivalrous face and the lofty bearing of the Maréchal d'Amville, who has come to bid farewell to his Queen and his ladye-love. With all the polish of a courtier, with all the pride of a soldier, and with that dignity of manner which noble natures, and these alone, acquire from a hopeless sorrow bravely borne, d'Amville kneels before her who was Queen of France in the sunny days that seem to have shone so long ago. Many a weary year has he knelt in spirit before that magic beauty which he now feels he looks on for the last time. He never expected for a moment that his wild hopeless love could win him anything but sorrow, yet he grudged it not, nor strove to conquer the idolatry for which he was prepared to pay its cruel penalty,—he is paying it even now. Kneeling there to kiss the white hand that reaches him a letter for her kinsfolk in France so gently and so gracefully, looking up once more at the face that will haunt him to his grave, and feeling that none but himself will ever know his folly or its punishment; and that she, its object, smiling so frankly upon him, little guesses how gladly he would give her his blighted life, then and there, at her feet.

But, gentleman and soldier as he is, none can guess

his heart by the unmoved brow, the unshaken voice, and the scrupulous deference with which he pays his homage. Gracefully he insists on the reception he will meet with in France, as bearing the latest news from her who was the pleasure and the pride of the whole kingdom, and his own good fortune in having been permitted to accompany her, and see her safely bestowed on her Scottish throne. Mary can scarcely keep back her tears at the allusion ; but, with so many jealous eyes around her, well she knows she must play her part at any cost, and she gulps them down with an effort.

‘Farewell,’ she says, ‘my brave protector and pilot ; be assured Mary Stuart never forgets a friend. You will advise the Guises of my welfare and happiness. You will tell the French court and the French people,’ she added, drawing herself up and speaking in a louder tone, so as to be heard by all, ‘that you left me on a royal throne, surrounded by the bravest and the most loyal nobility in Europe.’

A murmur of applause went the round of the circle at this spirited declaration, and Lord James gave the Queen a glance of mingled surprise and approval.

As d’Amville rose from his knee and retired, Chastelâr, who followed in the train of the Maréchal, passed before the Queen to make his farewell obeisance. The poet’s face wore an expression of determination foreign to its usual character ; but it was observed by one who watched its every turn that he never lifted his eyes above the hem of Mary’s robe. She inclined her head graciously to him nevertheless, and he passed into the outer circle, and was soon conversing lightly with the maids-of-honour and other of the courtiers.

It chanced, however, that the Queen had forgotten some additional message for her kinsfolk, with which she intended to charge d'Amville, and ere he had reached the door, she wished to call him back. The first person whose eye she caught happened to be the Earl of Arran, who had taken up a position opposite Her Majesty and seemed to observe her narrowly. Not unwilling to pay the house of Hamilton every compliment in her power, Mary beckoned the Earl to her side and charged him with her commission. Arran's wild eye flashed fire at the proposal !

'I will obey your commands, madam,' said he, rudely, 'though there be pages enough in the gallery to send after a French adventurer. It seems that France had better come to Holyrood and abide with your Majesty once for all.'

His tone was so loud, and his bearing so excited, that the bystanders gazed in astonishment on one another and on the Queen.

Mary looked surprised, almost scared for a moment, and then flushed with displeasure ; but her sweet temper soon prevailed, and she answered gently,

'Nay, cousin, you shall do my bidding yourself as you have always done. Have not you and I reason to look back upon the days we spent in France as the happiest of our lives ? Youth comes but once, my lord, and we shall neither of us ever be so light-hearted again.'

The unfortunate nobleman trembled from head to foot, and turned deadly pale. He seemed about to indulge in some frantic outbreak, which he repressed with an effort ; then with writhing lip and dilated nostril, he strode towards the door-way, the courtiers

making way for him as he passed with looks of astonishment and alarm.

Lord James, glancing at Morton, put his finger to his brow and shook his head gravely. The grim Douglas laughed his ghastly laugh, and with his hand on the haft of his dudgeon-dagger, muttered something about 'blood-letting' and 'melancholy,' that had he been the physician would have boded no good to the patient; and Arran rushing tumultuously through the gallery to cool his brow in the night-air, re-appeared in the Presence no more that night.

It seems to us there is a strange, sad moral in the history of this beautiful Queen. Probably the gift that women most desire beyond riches, wisdom, even virtue itself, is a power of fascination over the other sex; and this dangerous charm must have been possessed by Mary to a degree, that in the days of Greece and Rome would have been attributed to supernatural influence. With all her advantages of rank, talent, and education, this very quality, so far from adding to her happiness, seems to have been the one engine which worked her own destruction, and that of every kindly heart that came within her sphere. Few of the other sex could look upon Mary without an inclination, at least, to love her; and how many, like high-minded d'Amville and poor half-crazed Arran, had cause to curse the day when first they felt the spell of that sweet face, apparently so unconscious of its power! Of all the eminently beautiful women the world has seen, Mary Stuart wrought the most of wreck and utter ruin with the kindest disposition and the best intentions. Dalilah, we have never doubted, was a

heartless sensualist ; covetous only of pleasure and gold. The Phrynes and Aspasia were, probably, finished courtezans, with whom the affections were but instruments necessary to a profession of which they were thorough mistresses. Cleopatra, like a royal voluptuary, grudged no price for her desire ; and in her love of conquest, blazoned forth and made the most of her rich southern charms. *Margu rite de Valois*, knew and cultivated her resplendent beauty with the diligence of a devotee and the scientific aptitude of a Frenchwoman. But the Queen of Scotland alone seems to have been half ignorant and wholly careless of those advantages which women most prize and cherish ; seems to have regarded her loveliness as little as the flower its fragrance, and to have gone about frankly and freely dispensing her dangerous notice with the innocence of an involuntary and unconscious coquette.

It is notorious, that even the lower animals acknowledged the influence of this captivating nature. Dogs attached themselves to the Queen with their brave fidelity, from the instant they came into her presence. She loved to dress her own hawks, and was pleased to boast that she could reclaim the wild bird of the air with greater facility than the most experienced of her falconers. Horses that fretted and chafed under the boldest cavaliers, would bend at once to the gentle hand of the royal equestrian, and carry her with safety and docility. The brute yielded gladly, as though proud to contribute to her happiness ; and man looked and longed and grieved, and did his best to make both himself and her miserable.

Of physical beauty there is no question that she possessed an extraordinary share—perhaps more than any woman of that or any other age. Like her mother, she was of lofty stature and peculiar dignity of bearing, whilst she inherited from her father an exact symmetry, and the most graceful proportions. James V., though he made bad use of his physical advantages, was one of the comeliest and best-limbed men in his dominions. Mary's hand was a model for a sculptor, whilst every gesture and every movement of her body was at once womanly and dignified. But it was the Queen's face that rivetted the attention and fascinated both sexes with its entrancing loveliness. Other women might be beautiful; other women might have had the same smooth open brow, the same chiselled features and pencilled eye-brows, the same delicate chin and white full neck and bosom—aye, even the same long, soft hazel eyes, and rich dark chestnut hair; but where was the woman in Europe whose glance like hers, raised from under those sweeping eye-lashes, found its way straight to the heart? whose smile seemed at once to entreat and to command—to extort obedience and bestow reward, like sunlight penetrating the coldest object and warming and brightening all within its sphere? Yes, there was many a beautiful woman in France and Scotland, not to mention such fair dames at the English court as did not fear to provoke the displeasure of 'good Queen Bess' by too engaging a deportment, or too becoming an attire; but there was only one Mary Stuart, as many an aching heart in steel-clad bosom was fain to confess to its cost.

And yet on that fair face was often to be remarked an expression of melancholy, as though produced by some vague foreboding of evil, such as cast a shadow over the countenances of so many of the Stuarts.

Even James V., though he could revel with the noisiest, and sing many a merry stave of his own writing, amongst which,

‘We’ll go no more a roving
By the light of the moon,’

is not the least suggestive and poetical, bore on his brow this mysterious presage of evil, although it was perhaps more apparent, as well it might be, in the pensive lineaments of his descendant, the first Charles, and the surpassing beauty of his peerless daughter, Mary Queen of Scots. Was it this that the sooth-sayer meant, when Mary of Guise took her beautiful child, then a mere infant, to the famous Nostradamus, and bade him cast her horoscope, and foretell her destinies. The sage looked on the blooming face turned so artlessly towards his own, and announced in his deep grave tones, ‘There is blood on that fair young brow!’

Through her happy childhood, in the peaceful islet of Inch-ma-home—through her graceful youth, spent with the daughters of France in the quiet retreats of Amboise and Fontainebleau—through her early wedded life, and short supremacy, as through her widowhood, when the *Blanche Reine* was the darling and pride of the French court, this shadow of evil never left her. It pervaded her turbulent reign in Scotland, her many reverses, her cruel injuries, her disheartening defeats, her dreary

captivity. Perhaps it never faded from her brow till the glory of death shone over it, in the hands of the headsman at Fotheringay.

Mary looked round her courtiers in dismay at Arran's extraordinary conduct. The sad expression was more than usually apparent on her fair forehead; she whispered a few words to her brother, who seemed to be her refuge, as was natural, in her difficulties, and Lord James, darting another glance at Morton, quitted the apartment with his usual staid impassive air.

Then the Queen, rising, broke up the circle by which she was surrounded, and pacing through the room, addressed herself by turns to the different nobles present, and was observed to be more than usually condescending to the Earl of Morton, as though some instinctive prescience bade her deprecate, as early as possible, the hostility of that fierce uncompromising nature.

The Earl's grim countenance relaxed into a smile that added to its natural ghastliness, as she passed; and Secretary Maitland whispered to Lord John Stuart that,—

'The Douglas was in a courtly mood to-night, and reminded him of the lion in George Buchanan's elegy that was led by the lady in a silken chain;' to which the gay Prior of Coldinghame, contemplating a shapely leg he loved well to display in a galliard, replied with a light laugh,

'I never mistrust the lion so much as when he shows his fangs,' alluding to the prominent teeth and unshapely mouth of the redoubted Earl.

‘Nor I the Douglas so much as when he hides his claws,’ answered Secretary Maitland; and the two passed gaily on to take part in the amusements and revelry that once more enlivened the walls of old Holyrood.



CHAPTER VI.

'She waited not for guard nor groom,
But stepped into the hall :
Around her were the four Maries,
Herself the rose of all.'

IT is not always in the immediate presence of royalty that there is the most enlivening conversation, or the greatest amount of gaiety about a court. Although the Queen of Scotland was the essence of good humour, and when in comparative privacy, encouraged to the utmost freedom of intercourse and absence of formality amongst her attendants, yet on an occasion like the present, in a gathering of the great nobility of her kingdom, it may easily be imagined that an unusual amount of decorum and restraint was observed throughout the circle which actually surrounded their sovereign.

At a short distance, however, from these graver seniors were grouped the Maries, in the splendour of their courtly dresses, and the bloom of their own intrinsic charms. The young ladies seemed to have completely recovered whatever ill effects may have been produced by the hardships of a sea voyage, and their plumage, like that of certain tropical wild birds, appeared the sleeker and more variegated for the storms through

which they had passed. We would fain possess the pen of that eloquent writer who describes in our morning journals the weekly recurring changes of Parisian fashion, with a fidelity not to be surpassed by the superlative gossiping powers of Brantôme or Pepys, and a touching earnestness that never stops short of enthusiasm, and often amounts to poetry; then would we detail the tasteful costumes of this seductive quartette with an accuracy that should make the ladies' mouths water, and every hair on the head of the family stand on end. We would depict in glowing language their several robes of orange and violet and courtly *cramoisie*—the stately fall of their folds, the delicate edging of their lace, the trim defences of the jealous ruff, and rich embroidery on the shapely glove. We would not 'bate a pearl, nor a tress, nor a flounce, till the dazzled reader should count every stitch of needlework on the attire of these sumptuous damsels. But we must leave such visions to younger and keener eyesights, satisfied to take for granted the radiance of the Maries from the admiration they excited, and the compliments that were paid them by all.

As Chastelâr followed the Maréchal through the outer circle, he lingered for a few minutes amongst the maids-of-honour to take his leave of the ladies, with whom of late he had been so closely associated. It would have been amusing to mark the different effect his farewell produced on each individual of the four.

Mary Beton, half-a-head taller than her companions, magnificent in dress and deportment, received his salutation with the dignity of an empress accepting the homage of a vassal.

Mary Seton laughed in his face.

‘Farewell!’ said she, with mischief gleaming from her eyes: ‘Farewell! our fellow-sufferer and Princee of Troubadours. As you are never likely to cross the seas again, be sure you take baek with you to France nothing but what belongs to you. None of the hearts of us unfortunate maids-of-honour, for instance. They are prized in Scotland, I can tell you; and the Maries want at least as many as they have got amongst the five of them, you may be sure!’

‘And suppose I leave my own instead,’ answered Chastelâr, laughing, yet at the same time colouring, an embarrassment not unmarked by Mary Hamilton, who shot one eager glance at him, and turned her eyes away, blushing too; ‘suppose I must return to France, fair mistress, a loser by the exchange?’

‘We’ll have the palace swept and searched for the missing article,’ she answered gaily. ‘I think I can promise you that the one who has got it won’t keep it. There, you needn’t look so shocked, mistress Beton! You can’t guess which of the Maries has robbed our poor poet so mercilessly. It’s a sweet name, Mary, is it not? But don’t forget it rhymes to “vary.” And so, good luck to you, Chastelâr! and fare you well!’

‘*Souvent femme varie, fol qui s’y fie,*’ answered the poet, forcing a laugh, though a less acute observer than any one of the four might have noted that he was distressed at the turn their conversation had taken, and that the wilful girl’s shaft had been shot home. ‘Adieu, mistress Carmichael,’ he added, as she, too, in her turn frankly bade him farewell; and then he passed on to Mary Hamilton, and paused for an instant, irresolute, before the dark-eyed maid-of-honour.

She did not offer him her hand as the others had done. She never lifted her looks to his face. Pale as she usually was, she turned paler than ever, and her cold, distant bearing would have almost seemed to infer that she was offended, and that her greeting was extorted from her as a duty of ceremony, rather than springing from the free impulse of friendship.

And yet he knew it was not so. Though scarcely so quick-sighted on such matters as women, even men have an intuitive perception that they are beloved. In either sex the consciousness produces a kindly feeling towards the worshipper, and it seems hard to deny a few gentle words where so much is ungrudgingly bestowed. Mistaken compassion! Perhaps the fiercest efforts of hate would be less cruel than this ill-judged lenity. It is like hanging out the beacon where it shall guide the bark on to the quicksand. It is like Varney counterfeiting Leicester's whistle to lure Amy Robsart to destruction. When people pass spurious money in exchange for sterling gold they find themselves ere long in the felon's dock, but there is no law to punish the coiner who stamps a few false words with the royal die of truth, and pays them away unblushingly, for all the happiness and all the welfare, of the poor fool he deceives.

'You are going back to France,' said Mary Hamilton, with a wonderfully composed countenance and steady lip. 'It is your home—I wish you joy of your return.'

'Nay,' answered Chastelâr, his voice softening while he spoke. 'You know how happy I have been in Scotland. How devoted I must always be to this court and this country. I must follow d'Amville to Paris for

the present, but the one hope of my life will be, that I shall soon return.'

He spoke truly enough; he even hoped the royal lady then employing all the fascinations of her manner on Morton and his kindred, might hear his last words and give him one responsive glance to carry with him into his banishment. In this he was disappointed. The Queen, seated at some distance from the group, and surrounded by her barons, was for the moment 'every inch a Queen,' and Chastelâr passed out of Holyrood, with Mary Hamilton's 'farewell' warmer and more hopeful since his last words, to warn him, (could indeed warning ever profit in such cases,) that in stretching for the rose he would never reach, he was trampling the poor violet ruthlessly beneath his feet.

She seemed in better spirits too, after he was gone, although silent and inattentive to the surrounding gaiety, a distraction not unnoticed by Mary Beton, who believed herself officially answerable not only for the dresses and deportment of her three companions, but for the thoughts and sentiments of their inmost hearts.

'I have told you twice,' she said at length with an offended air, 'that the Queen rides out to-morrow for the hawking after early mass, and that you and Mary Seton will be in attendance. You will wear the sad-coloured riding-gear passamented with silver, and French hats,—but neither of you seem to heed me.'

'She is thinking of a French head, rather than a French hat,' laughed incorrigible Mary Seton, 'but indeed I have listened to you even more attentively than usual. Ah! mistress Beton, what would I not give to possess your careful forethought, and common

sense? *You* never neglect anything—*you* never forget anything. The Queen trusts you with her state-secrets, and when you carry her work to her in the Council-chamber, even Maitland and Morton look upon you as if you were one of themselves. Why are you not weak and giddy like me, or pensive and sad like Hamilton, or absent and haughty like Mary Carmichael has grown of late? Look at her yonder holding the Queen's train as if *she* were the Sovereign, and our beautiful Mistress, the maid-of-honour!

Mary Beton smiled, not displeased at the adroit flattery of her junior. She did indeed pride herself on two especial qualities, viz., utter impassability, and scrupulous attention to details.

‘I am somewhat older than the rest of you,’ she said, bridding her handsome neck within her handsome ruff, ‘and I have learned to avoid all pleasures and interests that take my attention from my duty. I am always responsible and always employed. I have no time for the follies that seem to afford the rest of you so much amusement.’

‘And yet you would become them well,’ said the other coaxingly. ‘Come now, be persuaded to play Diana in the next *masque*. I will dress your hair myself, and the gallants all vow you are fitted for the part both in person and character. Handsome and stately and cold.’

‘That is exactly why I do not care to join in it,’ replied the elder lady with increasing cordiality, for no daughter of Eve was ever yet insensible to flattery, even when ugly and repulsive and old, whereas Mary Beton could boast considerable attractions. ‘I tell you,

my dear, it is better to keep out of temptation. You envy me my self-command, you say, and I repeat to you it is a quality I possess because I am heart-whole and free.'

'But so am I,' interposed the girl vehemently, 'and so are we all, I suppose, in reality, for the matter of that; and yet it is possible that our time may be coming too,' she added reflectively. 'Ah! mistress Beton, I shall see you some day with a lover as stately as yourself, perhaps. What an imperial pair you will make!'

Mary Beton looked by no means displeased. The smile on her handsome face partook of a meaning expression not devoid of triumph, as though the contingency were neither very remote, nor wholly disagreeable, but of course the less she felt it to be unalterable, the more emphasis she laid on her denial.

'Never!' she exclaimed strenuously. 'I am surprised, my dear, at your thinking for an instant of such an absurdity. I never saw one yet, to my fancy, that I could like better than another.'

'Nor I neither,' echoed Mary Seton eagerly; adding in a voice of unusual gravity, and with a wistful expression on her countenance rarely seen there, 'I think if I did, it would be an unlucky day both for him and for me!'

Even while she spoke an unusual stir in the ante-room heralded the approach of some distinguished stranger who was to be received with more than ordinary ceremony. In such cases the Queen's ladies gathered round their mistress as in duty bound, although at other times it was Mary's practice to re-

tain but one of them in the immediate vicinity of her person, and to permit the rest to mingle in the general circle, amusing themselves in their own way. The duties devolving on 'the Maries' were indeed much to their liking, and might well be called a 'labour of love.' They vied with each other in passionate adoration of their mistress, whose sweet temper and generous disposition never failed to gain the hearts of all those who came about her person. If there was a charm in all the Stuarts which won blind devotion from their associates, what must have been the fascination that surrounded the gentlest and loveliest scion of that illustrious race!

The Queen of Scots was a thorough *gentlewoman* in the noblest and fullest acceptation of the term. That she lacked firmness where her affections were involved, and promptitude of action when her safety was threatened, what is this but to say that she was a woman and not a hero? Courage, both the masculine spirit that braves mortal peril, and the feminine fortitude that can sustain suffering and sorrow, she proved that she possessed on more than one stricken field, in more than one dreary house of humiliation and bondage. On both these chivalrous qualities the last scene of her life drew largely, and Bayard himself, the bravest of the brave, could not have faced death more nobly than did Mary, the fairest of the fair. Yet with all this she was exquisitely sensitive of the feelings of others—she could not bear to give pain, she hesitated to remonstrate, and could scarcely bring herself to chide. The regulations of her household, to the carrying out of which the Queen herself attended with housewifely care, prove

the regard she entertained for the personal comfort of her domestics.

The allowance for the table of her ladies and maids-of-honour was the same as that of their Sovereign. If the reader is curious to see the bill of fare for a royal dinner in the sixteenth century, the following are its contents:—

‘Four soups, four *entrées*, a piece of “beef-royal” boiled, a loin of mutton, and a capon; of roast meat, one neck of mutton, one capon, three pigeons, three hares, and two pieces of fat meat. For the dessert, seven dishes of fruit, and one of chicory-paste, one gallon of wine, one quart of white wine, and one of claret; eight rolls of bread.’ The latter item appears as if this plentiful supply were a dinner for but eight people. Probably, however, the remains of the feast furnished forth the inferior tables. A characteristic memorandum appears at the same time directing that the Queen’s ladies, including the Maries, shall have the same diet as their mistress.

Mary Carmichael was in attendance on Her Majesty and holding the royal train during the conversation we have detailed. It was broken off abruptly by the stir in the ante-room.

‘This must be the English Ambassador!’ exclaimed Mary Beton, drawing herself up to her full height, and assuming her most frigid air of *etiquette*.

‘He has come back sooner than he was expected, and I wish he had stayed away altogether,’ observed mistress Seton, on whom Randolph had made no favourable impression during their previous acquaintance, for the latter had held Elizabeth’s credentials at the Court of

Holyrood from the Queen of Scotland's first arrival, and had been absent to receive personal instructions from his own Sovereign but for a few weeks.

‘What is the matter with Mary Carmichael?’ whispered mistress Hamilton anxiously, as the three young ladies glided into their places behind the Queen. She might have spared herself the question, for almost ere it was spoken the agitation which caused it had disappeared; and although when Randolph entered the presence chamber, Mary Carmichael had started, turned very pale, and dropped the royal robe from her hand, ere he had advanced three paces, her colour had returned somewhat higher than before, and she was fulfilling her duties more scrupulously than ever, with an unusual expression of cold indifference on her fair and haughty face.



CHAPTER VII.

‘ For though I was rugged and wild and free,
I had a heart, like another man ;
And, oh ! had I known how the end would be,
I would it had broke ere the play began.’

AS Mary Stuart stood forward to welcome Elizabeth’s Ambassador to her court, many an eye dwelt on the face and figure of the Scottish Queen with enthusiastic admiration. Though dressed in the mourning which she still wore for her first husband, the dark folds of her robe did but enhance the brilliancy of her complexion, and whilst even the spotless ruff did not detract from the fairness of her neck, the whitest hand in Europe hung like a snow-drop against the black volume of her draperies. Even Randolph, cynic though he were, could not repress a thrill of delight as he approached so beautiful an object, though the sentiment uppermost in his diplomatic heart, had he put it into words, would probably have been as follows :—

‘ It is lucky my mistress cannot see you at this moment, or she would hate you more cordially than ever, and my task would be even more difficult than it is !’

He made his obeisance, nevertheless, with the cool assurance and easy grace of a practised courtier. The

Queen received him with a cordiality that she seemed anxious should not be lost on the bystanders.

‘A messenger from my loving cousin,’ said she, ‘is always welcome; how much more when he comes in the person of our old and esteemed friend Mr. Randolph.’

The Ambassador answered in a few well-chosen words for his Sovereign and himself, dropping once more on his knee, and craving permission to present an autograph letter and a costly ring from Elizabeth to the cousin whom she never saw. Mary received them both with expressions of unbounded delight, and the shrewd bearer, judging from his own experience and his own heart, argued that there must be no small weakness concealed under so much affection, and that it was unnatural for one woman to be so fond of another, unless she felt herself uncomfortably in her power.

Mary questioned him of his journey.

‘You have had a long ride,’ said the Queen, ‘and we can but give you a rude though hearty welcome. A long ride, and a dangerous, for indeed the borders of both countries are not so quiet as we could wish, or as we hope to render them before many months are past.’

Randolph answered with ready tact,—

‘It is to the Queen of Scotland’s servants I owe my safe arrival at Holyrood. Permit me to recall to your Majesty’s recollection an Archer of your old Scottish Guard.’

With these words he drew Maxwell forward and presented him to the Queen. Randolph was a good-natured man when it cost nothing, and, moreover, it was a part of his profession to make a friend wherever it could be done at a small outlay. Mary received

Walter Maxwell with the utmost condescension. Had she followed her own impulse, she would have shaken him cordially by both hands and bidden him a hearty welcome, for the sake of old times and the memory of her dear France; but monarchs must not give way to impulse, and indeed are better without such weaknesses as affections and associations. So he knelt low before her and kissed her royal hand, the while Mary Carmichael seemed to have discovered something so engrossing in the skirt of her mistress's robe that she never lifted her eyes from the embroidery with which it was adorned.

'And how fared you in the wild Border-land?' resumed the Queen, 'the land of moss and moor—of jack and spear—a pleasant district if you want to breathe a horse or fly a hawk, but, as our loyal burghers say, bad to sleep in for those who would pull their boots off when they retire to rest.' The Queen spoke of the Border as though it brought agreeable associations to her mind, and indeed she dearly loved the open plain and the free air of Heaven.

'Had it not been for your Warden, Madam,' answered the courtier, 'I might have slept in my boots till the day of judgment. This gallant Archer and myself would scarce have had a tale to tell, if the Earl of Bothwell did not take to spur and snaffle as kindly as the wildest freebooter on the Marches.'

'How so?' enquired Mary, the colour mantling to her cheek, and her eye sparkling with animated interest. The Queen was a Stuart to the marrow, and loved well to hear of a gallant feat of arms.

'Why thus, Madam,' replied the Ambassador. 'Ere

the moon had been up an hour, we saw ourselves beset by a party of some ten or twelve horsemen, who occupied a pass in front of us, and as we were but three, I leave your Majesty to judge that my feelings, as a man whose trade is rather peace than war, were by no means agreeable. My companion, I may observe, was all for fighting, without counting.' He spoke, as usual, in a tone that might be either jest or earnest; also, as usual, nothing within the range of his eye escaped him. He noted the Queen's interest. He observed Mary Carmichael look up for an instant, and resume the study of her embroidery with a heightened colour. He caught mistress Beton in the fact, examining his own person with an air of dignified approval that amounted to admiration; and it was not lost upon him, that while Lord James looked more anxious than common, others of the circle exchanged glances of deeper meaning than his plain tale would at first appear to warrant. All this he saw without seeming to see, and made a note of his observations.

'And you charged them and cut your way through!' exclaimed the Queen, with head up and flashing eyes, like some beautiful Amazon, clenching her slender hand the while as though it held a sword.

'Charge them, your Majesty, we did perforce, for it was more dangerous to go back than forward; but the cutting seemed more on their part than ours. The situation, too, was ridiculous enough, had a man been in cue to laugh!' resumed Randolph in the same dry sneering tones. 'My comrade's horse was rolling on the heather, and he defending himself like a second St. George on foot. My servant, saving your Grace's

presence, a beef-fed knave from Smithfield, roared and plunged about like a baited bull, till he received a *coup-de-grâce* that would have cracked any skull but a Londoner's, from a useful instrument that my Lord Bothwell tells me is called a Jedwood-axe. Whilst I myself, vainly endeavouring to protect person and property, was forced to abandon my valise, and turn all my attention to the defence of my own head.'

'And they robbed you of your despatches!' exclaimed Lord James, interrupting the narrator with ill-concealed anxiety, while three or four nobles glanced at each other with looks of covert triumph and amusement. 'Indeed, Madam,' added the future Regent, recovering himself with an effort, 'these outrages are insupportable; they must be promptly punished and put down!'

'And they shall be so,' answered Mary, drawing herself up proudly, 'if I ride through the "Debateable Land" myself in corslet and head-piece, as my fathers did before me. Alas! I fear steel harness is the most fitting attire for a Scottish Queen.—But you have not told us how you escaped,' proceeded she, turning to Randolph with marked courtesy and a softened manner. 'You were rescued, were you not, at your utmost need, by our Warden?'

'The Earl of Bothwell did, indeed, come riding in like a whirlwind,' replied Randolph, 'at the very moment when I had resolved that my last sleep must be that booted one to which your Majesty's citizens have such a rational objection. If the Warden of the Marches be chosen for his prowess in single combat, there never was a better selection! Man and horse

went down before his lance without a struggle, and his very war-cry seemed to act upon the freebooters like the shriek of a hawk on a wisp of wild-fowl. 'Faith they took to their wings like wild-fowl too, where it was hopeless to follow them, and I rode home to supper at Hermitage without the slightest wish to cultivate a further acquaintance with that portion of your Majesty's domains.'

The Queen laughed as he concluded. She had listened with obvious interest to the Englishman's account of the skirmish, and seemed in heightened spirits when it was over. She beckoned to Mary Beton, and whispered in that lady's ear, who retired from the circle, and presently returned followed by a page, bearing a small gold cup, richly chased and decorated with precious stones. It was filled with wine, and Mary put her own lips to it ere she offered it to Randolph.

'You will pledge us,' said the Queen, with her sunny smile, 'and when you drink to a lady, sir, not a drop must remain in the cup. If you examine it, you will see that its sides are ornamented with lance-heads, and trophies of arms. Will you favour Mary Stuart by keeping it in remembrance of your rough ride, and the dangers you affronted in her service?'

Randolph bowed to the ground. He knew and appreciated the value of such a compliment, and whilst he saw in the giver's frank countenance and cordial manner the sincerity of her good-will, his heart never smote him for the double part he was expressly sent there to play.

The Queen's curiosity did not yet seem, however, to be thoroughly satisfied, and she questioned the Amba-

sador, with considerable minuteness, as to the appearance and bearing of his foes. Randolph's answers were marked by his usual tone of covert sarcasm; but she elicited no more from him than he had already detailed, save that the valise which he had lost contained in reality no papers of importance, or, indeed, any papers whatever, except a few private memoranda of his own—an announcement which seemed to clear Lord James's brow from a load of care, while it created obvious disappointment on two or three other anxious faces.

The truth was, that Randolph, faithful to his own Queen in the faithless part which he enacted to another, was the bearer of certain instructions to Lord James, which were very different in tenor from the cordial letter he was charged by Elizabeth to deliver to her cousin. There was even yet a strong Catholic party about the court, to whom the possession of these despatches would have been an inestimable windfall, no less, indeed, than a foundation for a charge of treason against the Queen's Protestant half-brother.

The attack, then, on Randolph and his companion was prompted by nobler names than the Armstrongs and Elliotts who lived by rapine on the borders; but their schemes had been baffled by the wily Englishman, who fought like a demon to preserve the valise, of which he was, in reality, utterly careless, and by that means, led his assailants to believe that, in carrying it off, they had become possessed of a valuable prize.

'I am charged by the Earl of Bothwell,' said Randolph, at the conclusion of his narrative, 'to present his unalterable duty to your Majesty. His lordship,

not satisfied with extricating me from the sloughs of the "Debateable Land," has sent his own henchman to conduct me safely to the capital.'

Mary started perceptibly, and the colour she could not entirely repress rose faintly to her cheek. Well did she know that her Warden was thoroughly devoted to her interests, and that, in whatever intrigues he might be mixed, Bothwell's loyalty was unshaken to his Queen. Perhaps she may have already asked herself whether it did not partake of that devotion which shed a halo over the days of chivalry. At all events, his sending his own henchman to the court, denoted some more than usual necessity for communicating with his Sovereign; and Mary prepared to take her measures accordingly.

At that unhappy period, when not a day passed without the hatching of some plot, the development of some intrigue—when every man's hand was against his neighbour, and noble preyed upon noble without scruple or remorse, even the Queen was obliged to remember that jealous eyes were on the watch for her every movement, and to practise dissimulation, where dissimulation was alike unsafe and unworthy.

She turned to Mary Seton, who had been listening with an appearance of great amusement, and gave her some directions in a low voice, that even Randolph's quick ears could not overhear.

The young lady curtsied, and withdrew, first casting a glance of considerable meaning at Mary Carmichael, who replied to it by assuming as unconscious an air as was compatible with the red spot that burned in either cheek.

Walter Maxwell now found himself in the presence of the lady whom he had been determining so many long weeks that he would forget, and to see whom once more, he had consistently abandoned his profession, and undertaken a long journey by sea and land. As is usually the case, the moment he had looked forward to hardly repaid the anxiety of expectation. The maid-of-honour's greeting was formal in the extreme, betraying a degree of coldness that seemed almost to argue aversion; and he was, of course, fool enough to be hurt and angry, instead of pleased and triumphant. Who ever saw a woman accost the man she loves with half the cordiality she displays to the merest acquaintance? On the contrary; she receives his greeting with a reserve that to any one else would be positive rudeness; and even when alone with him, preserves, for a space, a certain embarrassment in her womanly shame and fear, lest she should betray the tenth part of all she feels.

Mary Carmichael was no exception to the rule of her sex. In fact, she possessed more than her due share of that pride which, when brought in contact with a kind nature, produces so much sorrow, and with a proud one, so much dissension. Although the Queen, who was again seated, had dismissed her from her duty as train-bearer, and she was at liberty to converse with all the freedom a crowded assembly permits, she could think of no more pertinent remark to make to her admirer than the following.

‘You have brought us news from the French court, master Maxwell? Is it as gay as it used to be? I wonder you had the heart to leave it.’

There was something in her manner that repelled and irritated him.

‘I came to serve my Queen,’ he replied, stiffly, and in a tone as cold as her own. ‘Our Sovereign knows how to appreciate loyalty, and does not forget her old adherents in the short space of a few months.’

‘Our Sovereign would welcome a lap-dog if it came from France, I think,’ replied the other, indifferently, utterly disregarding the future suffering her insincerity would cause herself. ‘Our Sovereign has already expressed her satisfaction at seeing you, and would probably give you a yet heartier greeting if you could inform her of the latest fashions in head-tire and farthingale. We are far behind-hand here, you see, in these barbarous regions!’

She spoke with an assumption of levity so unlike herself, that he was disgusted as well as angry; and, indeed, it was somewhat unjust that the maid-of-honour should thus revenge upon him her own confusion at his appearance.

‘I am no silk-mercator,’ he answered, rudely, ‘nor have I travelled so far to bring a lady the colour of a ribbon,’—and with a swelling heart, and a feeling of pain he could not have believed possible, without experiencing it, Walter Maxwell turned away, and lost himself amongst the crowd of surrounding courtiers.

Far different was the conversation carried on at the same moment by that courtly pair, the diplomatic Mr. Thomas Randolph, and the stately mistress Mary Beton. The former, with his keen political foresight, had lately been reflecting, that a close intimacy with at least one of the household, would open a fertile

channel for information regarding the Queen's private thoughts and doings, such as would be invaluable to him in his present capacity as confidential agent to Elizabeth. He had also observed the admiration which his late appearance had obviously elicited from the senior maid-of-honour, and he had no more scruple in deliberately proceeding to make love to that austere damsel, than he would have had in putting her to the torture, had the latter process rather than the former, been the most effectual way of gaining her confidence.

Mary Beton was not insensible to admiration. She was a woman, and with all her magnificence of deportment, consequently inherited the propensities of her sex; but she would not have appreciated indiscriminate homage, and the dish to please her palate, if we may so speak, required to be elaborately dressed and seasoned, and sent up on a silver trencher at least.

To have won Mr. Randolph's good opinion, however, was a conquest of which any lady might be proud. The Ambassador's high position, his invariable assurance and self-reliance, his thorough knowledge of the world, and sarcastic readiness of tongue, had rendered him an object of considerable interest to the dames of the Scottish Court. They exaggerated, as women will, his influence, his talents, his successes—diplomatic as well as social—and the favour with which he was regarded by the English Queen. They quoted him, they talked about him,—above all, they were a little afraid of him; and the latter sensation possesses an indefinable charm for the venturous tendencies of the female character.

Mary Beton was startled to find how gratifying to her self-love were the attentions of the English courtier.

It was difficult to say by what subtle process he led her to infer that he took pleasure in her society. Every word he said might have been proclaimed unblushingly by the Lion King-at-Arms. And yet, before Randolph had spoken a dozen sentences to Mary Beton, he had dexterously led her to infer that she was the only woman in that crowded assemblage whom he considered worthy of his notice; that their ideas were sympathetic, their tastes similar, and that a mutual alliance must necessarily be established between them.

To-night he confined himself to a few adroit questions respecting the costumes in a proposed *masque*; and Mary Beton answered them with a freedom far different from her usual reticence. All he wanted was to pave the way to her confidence; and he was the last man to scare the steed by showing the halter while he proffered the corn. So he took his leave as soon as he saw he had made a favourable impression, and went his way cheerfully to sup with Morton and Maitland, leaving mistress Beton in a most agreeable frame of mind, with her head, at least, an inch higher than usual.

We must now follow Mary Seton as she glided stealthily away from the presence to fulfil the Queen's whispered command.

With an expression of more than usual intelligence on her saucy features, that active damsel hurried through the ante-rooms and galleries, and along certain dark stone passages, which she threaded with the confidence of one to whom these intricacies were familiar, till she reached a small vaulted apartment, from whence

emanated a prevailing odour of beef and ale, denoting it to be the buttery. Spur and steel scabbard clattered on the stone floor of this resort, and rough voices might be heard jeering and pledging each other with a rude cordiality, proportioned to the extent in which, as the Scotch say, '*The malt got above the meal.*'

A grave individual in black, however, presided over these festivities, and could always keep order by the summary process of refusing to draw more ale. This official started to behold the white figure of the maid-of-honour standing in the door-way; but Mary Seton, with a finger on her lip, simply said, 'Lord Bothwell's henchman,' and the Seneschal, interrupting that personage with the black jack of ale at his lips, brought him into the dark stone passage, and confided him to the radiant messenger before he was aware.

Dick Rutherford, though his faculties were of the keenest on a moonless night in Liddesdale, was somewhat confused on this his first visit to Holyrood; nor were his intellects necessarily brightened by a huge repast of beef, washed down with strong ale, after a long ride, and a fourteen hours' fast.

Once in the passage, he thought he was dreaming. A vision of loveliness in shining array, whose head reached to about the middle of his corslet, accosted him with hasty frankness.

'You left Hermitage this morning?' said she, laconically.

'At day-break,' answered the borderer, scarcely reassured by this accurate knowledge of his movements.

'You have a letter from the Warden for the Queen?' proceeded the damsel.

‘A letter!’ repeated ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh,’ his Scottish caution coming rapidly to the rescue. ‘I’ll no say but there might be a bit parcel, or such like. If I’ve no lost it by the way,’ he added, doubtfully, and feeling the while under his corslet for the safety of the packet.

Mary Seton’s little foot stamped impatiently, whereat the giant started in his boots. She turned upon him quite fiercely.

‘A jackman does not lose a Queen’s packet,’ said she. ‘If he does, he may chance to lose his own head. Follow me!’ and she flitted on through the dark passages, turning at intervals to see that she was followed by the astonished borderer.

Presently they climbed a narrow winding stair. After ascending several steps, the maid-of-honour stopped, opened a door, and pushing aside some heavy folds of tapestry, bade her follower enter, warning him not to strike his head against the low door-way.

‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh,’ dazzled and confused, found himself in a very small and brilliantly lighted apartment. The roof was high; but the room itself was scarcely large enough to contain six or eight persons. A table prepared for supper, and laid for two, occupied the whole space between the window and the ample hearth, on which a wood fire blazed and crackled cheerfully. The borderer’s gaze was rivetted at once by the gold plate on the supper-table, richly chased, and bearing the crown-royal on its burnished surface.

Mary Seton could not forbear a smile at his astonishment.

‘This is somewhat different from the head of a

glen in Liddesdale,' said she, with a ringing laugh. 'Thanks to my good-nature, you have now seen a Queen's chamber. Give me your packet, and get you gone!'

While she spoke, she ran her eye over the athletic figure of the borderer, magnificent in its size and strength when seen in that small apartment, and well set off by his war-like gear.

'What a fine man,' thought Mary Seton, as she scanned him. 'And oh! what a good face, and how unlike a courtier.'

But on 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh's' honest countenance might be seen an expression of great perplexity. In the first place, he was a good deal charmed, and not a little stupefied, by the beauty of his guide. In the next, he was extremely apprehensive of an immediate apparition of royalty; and lastly, he was embarrassed how to refuse anything to the most fascinating young lady he had ever yet set eyes on. Nevertheless, he answered stoutly though deferentially,

'My packet must be delivered into the Queen's ain hand. You're no the Queen hersel', I'm thinking, though well you might be, my bonny lady, for I never saw the like o' ye.'

The tone of admiration in which he spoke was so obviously involuntary as to be flattering in the extreme.

Mary Seton looked pleased, and continued more graciously,

'I spoke to prove you. You can be faithful to a trust, can you? What is your name?'

'They call me Dick Rutherford,' he answered; 'but in Liddesdale I'm "Dick-o'-the-Cleugh." Ask the Lid-

desdale lads if I'm to be trusted ! But I'm hivering. The like o' you will never set your bonny foot in Liddesdale, nor ask tidings o' the like o' me.'

Dick spoke almost despondently for a moment. He brightened up though at her reply.

'A brave man and an honest is the noblest of God's creatures. I believe you to be both. Although,' she added, mischievously, 'they're scarce enough at Holyrood, there are a good many more brave men than honest on *your* side the country, or I've been misinformed.'

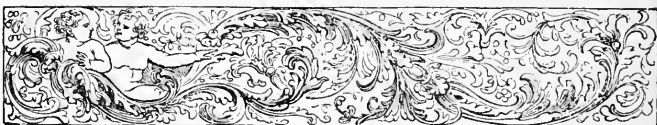
Dick was on the eve of entering into an elaborate defence of his kindred, and an explanation of border probity, which could not but have been edifying, when he was interrupted by the entrance of the Queen herself, about to sup, after the fatigues of the day, private and quietly, with her kinswoman the Countess of Argyle.

The borderer was now completely overwhelmed. Nevertheless, he delivered his packet with an honest simplicity, in favourable contrast to the manners of most of her ambassadors ; and Mary Stuart acknowledged its receipt with a few gold pieces, and dismissed him with her pleasantest smile.

His previous conductor guided him back till she landed him in the court of the palace ; and although 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' possessed to the full the loyalty of his countrymen, and a borderer's devoted admiration for womanly beauty, he had no distinct recollection of the Sovereign's countenance, so completely was it effaced from his memory by her bewitching maid-of-honour.

Poor Dick ! Many a long day afterwards his honest

heart ached when he thought of that memorable night, recalling the merry eyes and the sunny hair, and the dazzling figure of his fascinating guide. Brave, simple 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh!' He had better have been up to his neck in the softest moss in all Liddesdale.



CHAPTER VIII.

‘ But had I wist before I kist,
That love had been sae hard to win,
I’d have locked my heart in a case of gowd,
An’ pinned it wi’ a siller pin.’

IT was the anniversary of the death of Francis II., and Mary, whose attachment to her youthful husband evinced itself by a scrupulous respect for his memory, had ordered a dirge to be performed in the Royal Chapel at Holyrood for the repose of his soul. The sacred edifice had been appropriately hung with black; nor was any accessory neglected that could enhance the gloom of the scene. Carpenters had been employed for some days previously in preparing the mournful display, and a good deal of murmuring and discontent had arisen both in the court and city at the proposed ordinance. The *Godly*, as the Protestant party somewhat presumptuously termed themselves, mistrusted this return to Papal ceremonials, and made no secret of their dissatisfaction.

Mary, however, tolerant as she was of opposite opinions, always remained staunch to the ritual in which she had been brought up, and spared no pains

to carry out with due pomp a solemnity which she esteemed essential to the occasion.

The morning broke gloomily, when the Queen, attired in deep mourning, and attended only by Lady Hamilton, entered the chapel for early mass. Her lovely face looked paler than usual under the veil of crape which shaded it, and there was an expression of something more than sorrow, of annoyance and apprehension on its lineaments. Perhaps she was thinking of her brief reign in France, not long enough for a Sovereign to discover the many troubles and anxieties that line a crown. Perhaps she was recalling the adoration she had been used to receive from the excitable French people, and contrasting it with the gloomy brows and ominous mutterings she had already encountered amongst her new subjects.

Mary had been but a few weeks on the Scottish throne ere she became aware that even her beauty and her bereavement were not sufficient to cover the *odium* of her religion in the eyes of these northern zealots, and that Protestantism might esteem it a duty both to God and man to insult a helpless woman because she was a Catholic Queen.

As she passed slowly up the aisle with weary step and downcast air, followed by her maid-of-honour, it may be that both the women were longing wearily for that rest which they came here to seek—glad to be relieved, if but for an hour, of the burden which at some future time they should cast down at once and for ever—almost wishing that the time was come and the journey over and the resting-place at hand.

And now the anthem swells and sinks and fills the

echoing aisle; and the crimson light streams through the deep-stained windows on chiselled font and sculptured cross and monumental marble, while the tones of the choristers rise and fall like the song of angels speaking of hope and peace and pardon for the penitent—wailing in their celestial sorrow for the loved that yet are lost for evermore.

In that flood of harmony the Queen bathed her wounded spirit, bidding it condemn the reefs and rocks that beset its earthly course as it floated, if but for an instant, towards the eternal shore; and Mary Hamilton, joining in the tide of prayer and praise, forgot her hopes and fears, her tottering happiness and earthly misgivings, while she felt that there was yet in store for her a home of endless welcome, a joy that no uncertainty could poison, a love no falsehood could take away.

Prosperity goes to church, as well it may, to return thanks for the benefits it has received; to fulfil, as it were, its own part of the compact by which it flourishes; to acknowledge its advantages and to entreat their continuance; then it walks back into the sunshine in its purple and fine linen, with a pleasant consciousness of debts discharged and duties well fulfilled. Not so its ailing brother, gaunt Adversity. For the latter the temple of God is the temple of refuge; the temple of healing, the temple of consolation; thither it may bring its sores and its sackcloth, without misgivings and without shame; there it is on a level with the proudest, and in unison with the happiest; it drinks from the same stream, and out of the same cup; it returns to its

labour and its sorrow, strengthened and refreshed. Though the heart be aching, it is sound and unbroken still; and the storms may pelt their fiercest, it only longs the more to come again.

As the anthem proceeded the Scottish Queen became aware that another voice had been added to her choir, of considerable depth and volume, thereby completing its harmony and greatly enhancing its effect. This organ was the property of an individual whose unfortunate destiny it was to make a far greater stir at the court of Holyrood than became either his talents or his station, and to meet with a fate which his antecedents did not deserve.

In the train of the Count de Moretta, Ambassador from the court of Savoy, the Duke of which principality was another unsuccessful suitor for the hand of the Scottish Queen, came a good-humoured little Italian, David Riccio by name, whose especial gifts at this period seem to have been a knack of mimicry, not unusual among his countrymen, and a fine bass voice of great power and sweetness.

These were the qualities that first recommended him to the notice of Mary; and when, in addition to his musical acquirements, she found him quick-witted, ready and obliging, fluent with the pen, and a perfect master of the French language, she promoted the good-humoured, deformed, and diminutive foreigner to the post of private secretary, little dreaming of the construction which would hereafter be put upon so harmless an appointment.

In the meantime Riccio revelled in the exercise of his delightful talent—filling the crape-hung building

with his notes of mournful melody—and Mary listened entranced, and forgot for the moment her troubles, her widowhood, and her crown.

But the charms of music, and even the consolations of religion, can but stave off earthly cares for a brief period of repose, after which they are prone to thrust themselves on our notice with a vigour all the more imperative for such temporary respite. When mass was concluded, and Mary, with her maid-of-honour, was about to quit the chapel, she could not but observe how none, save her immediate attendants and personal household, had assisted to form the congregation; how the nobility of her court, with but few exceptions, had remained outside with a certain ostentatious assumption of dissent from the religion of their Queen. She could not help remarking as much to her attendant.

‘Do you not see, my dear,’ said she bitterly, ‘how the new religion is disposed to charity and toleration? My Protestant lords will not even join in the devotions of their Sovereign when she prays for the welfare of her husband’s soul. They will not “weep with those who weep,” nor “rejoice with those who rejoice,” unless it be by Master Knox’s permission, and in black cassock and Geneva band. Verily, Mary Hamilton, it is a weary lot to be a woman, but it is a daily humiliation to be a Queen!’

‘I know not what a Queen’s trials may be, Madam,’ answered the other, on whose sweet face the halo of devotion had not yet faded away; ‘but a woman’s sorrows I fancy may be too hard for a woman to bear, unless she brings them with her unreservedly and lays them all down here.’

While she spoke she stood near the chapel-door, and the December sun, shedding its rays through the deep red cross of the stained window above, streamed full upon her fair and gentle face. It seemed to her Mistress even then that she looked like some patient saint, purified by suffering, and bearing the cross of her Master in the red glory of martyrdom.

But such holy thoughts as these were soon driven from Mary's mind by fresh annoyances. On leaving her chapel, and emerging into the court-yard of her palace, the Queen found it crowded by an assemblage of her nobility, whose motley apparel of the gayest and gaudiest hues, contrasted offensively with her own sad mourning garb. Not one of them had shown sufficient sympathy with her feelings to wear so much as a black ribbon on his doublet, or to doff the plume that flaunted from his rich velvet bonnet. Stung to the quick by such disrespect, Mary determined to meet it by an insult as injudicious as it was unworthy. Halting on the threshold of her chapel, she took not the slightest notice of the salutations offered her by the proudest lords in Scotland, but beckoned to the new singer, whose voice had recently so much delighted her, and giving him her missal to carry, complimented him with marked familiarity on his performance; and so holding the astonished Italian in conversation at the chapel-door, kept every one else waiting uncovered until she had done with him.

Many a haughty brow was already bent on the unknown stranger. Grey mustaches that had bristled in the teeth of the English archers at Flodden, were pulled in mingled astonishment and anger, while hands,

always too prompt to shed blood, griped dagger and sword-hilt, as though neither the sacred locality nor the presence of the Sovereign would long restrain them from open violence. The first impulse of the Scottish noble was to resent an insult or avenge an injury on the spot. Morton alone of all the crowd, seemed to experience neither indignation nor surprise. The smile that gave his face so fiendish an expression, only deepened and hardened round his mouth. He glanced from the Queen to her ill-chosen favourite with looks rather of amused malignity than offended pride. Morton's will was strong in proportion to his passions, and these with all their abiding energy, were thoroughly under the control of his hard unfeeling nature. The Douglas was indeed one of those who would 'strike sooner than speak, and drink sooner than pray.' Yet he only glared on the singer with a kind of comic ferocity, and the poor little Italian shrunk nearer his protectress with a prophetic horror of the hard-featured Earl.

Bidding Riccio follow in her train, the Queen passed on through the cloisters of the palace towards her own apartments, returning with cold courtesy the salutations of her nobility. The courtiers looked meaningly at each other and then at the new favourite who slunk along behind his mistress, bearing her gorgeous missal, in ludicrous dismay. Secretary Maitland, a man whose wits were always at hand, and who could transact more business in ten minutes than the rest of the privy council in as many days, approached Her Majesty with a huge bundle of papers under his arm, and the

Queen, taking them from him, without remark, handed the whole, at once, to Riccio. The Secretary ventured on an expostulation.

‘They are for your Majesty’s *private* information,’ said he, deferentially, but in a tone of marked disapproval.

‘And I have given them to my *private* secretary,’ replied Mary, haughtily; thus hastily and injudiciously confirming the appointment that led to such disastrous results.

‘Shall I attend your Grace, to explain their contents?’ asked Maitland, as coolly as if nothing unusual had taken place.

‘When I send for you, sir,’ answered the Queen; and even Maitland’s assurance was compelled to give way. He could but bow and fall back amongst the crowd.

Some of the nobles were so offended that they quitted the court on the spot; others thought it a bad opportunity to press their respective suits with the Sovereign and lounged off, as it were inadvertently, to their different amusements and occupations,—one to fly a hawk, another to try a horse, not a few to break their fast on rich food and strong potations, the while they discussed the gossip of the court, which had received no inconsiderable fillip from the events of the morning.

Lord James walked gravely away to Mr. Randolph’s lodging. His brother, the gay lay-prior of Coldinghame, mounted his horse to join a merry-making on Leith sands. The Earl of Huntley and the Earl Marchal departed to prepare an ordinance for the

Council, discussing, to all appearance, weighty matters of state; yet, perhaps, could their dialogue have been overheard, it related to far less important topics. The court-yard of the palace was almost deserted, and Mary, dismissing her maid-of-honour and the Italian, prepared to take a solitary turn up and down the cloisters to soothe her temper and compose her troubled mind.

The Queen thought she was alone. It was not so, however, for, from the moment of her leaving the chapel, her movements had been watched by a man concealed behind one of the arches, and no sooner had her attendants quitted her than he emerged from his hiding-place.

Mary started, and almost screamed, as this unexpected figure stepped forth and stood in front of her. Indeed, a bolder nature might have been alarmed at its wild appearance and the vehemence of its gestures.

Pale and haggard, all unbraced, and with disordered dress—but unarmed, even to his sword—the Earl of Arran confronted Mary Stuart with none of the ceremony observed by a subject in the presence of his Queen.

‘At last!’ he shouted with passionate vehemence, and placing himself so that she could not pass by him. ‘At last I see thee once more. After weary hours of watching by night and day, after danger and difficulty and longing, I see thee once more. No longer the Queen of Scotland, surrounded by her court, and haughty in all the panoply of royalty, but Mary Stuart, the flower of womanhood, the darling of France, and the idol of Arran’s heart.’

‘What mean you, my lord,’ exclaimed the Queen, utterly aghast at this unheard of proceeding, and hardly knowing, in her astonishment, whether to stand or fly. ‘Are you mad or dreaming? I am, indeed, Mary Stuart, and it is not thus I should be accosted by the Earl of Arran.’

‘Mad!’ returned the unfortunate nobleman, the wild cunning of insanity gleaming from his eye, and pointing with his wasted hand to the palace windows as he spoke. ‘Hark ye, Madam; they are mad, up yonder. Mad from vaults to roof of this accursed building; this stronghold of superstition and papacy. The Lord James is mad, who would deliver his sister into the hand of the ungodly; the priests are mad, who would withhold her, by main force, from the tidings of salvation; the choristers are mad, singing their unholy dirges for the souls that are gone to perdition. Mary! Mary!’—he changed to accents of wild affection and entreaty: ‘I alone am devoted to you. The house of Hamilton is the only refuge for the Stuart.’

Mary was constitutionally brave. Her courage began to return as she reflected she was within call of her household and retainers. She had a natural regard, too, for her kinsman, and a woman’s pity for the wreck that something within, too truly, told her she herself had made. She tried to quiet the poor maniac with soothing, gentle words.

‘Nay, cousin,’ said the Queen, ‘when have I doubted your loyalty or your honour? Why come to assure me of it at this unbecoming hour, and in this unbecoming guise? You are afflicted, Arran, and ill-at-ease. Retire into the palace, our own physician

shall attend you, the best of lodging and the best of care shall not be grudged to my kinsman.'

For a moment Arran seemed calmer, and once or twice he passed his hand across his brow, as though waking from some troubled sleep, or trying to recall some lost recollection. And, indeed, whilst the Queen kept her eye on him, though he tried hard to avoid her glance, it held him in a certain subjection. No sooner, however, was it withdrawn, than his madness blazed forth once more.

'It is the plot!' he shouted again, as though addressing some imaginary audience; 'the accursed traitorous plot, that I alone have power to prevent. Papist and Protestant, rebel and renegade, from the four winds of heaven, they are banded together to carry off my Queen. Listen, Madam, on my knees I implore you to listen.'

He knelt, and clasped Mary's hand in both his own.

'I have discovered a conspiracy to seize your royal person, and to carry you into bondage. Lord James has consented to join in it. The Earls of Seton and Livingstone have signed the bond drawn up by smooth and crafty Lethington, with every name attached in characters of blood, except his own. Morton has promised his assistance, for when was the Douglas out of any scheme of violence and crime? And Bothwell, with his border reprobates, is to put it in execution; but Arran will save his Queen!'

'How say you? Morton? my brother? trusty Seton? and Bothwell, loyal and true? Impossible! You are raving,' said the Queen, now thoroughly alarmed. 'Where shall I turn to? What shall I do?'

‘The Hamiltons will rally round the Stuart!’ exclaimed the maniac, rising from his knees, and making as though he would seize Mary in his arms.

Before she could call for help, however, he suddenly desisted from his purpose, and placing his finger on his lip with a gesture of caution and a glance at the Queen, in which cunning and imbecility were strangely mingled, moved swiftly and stealthily away.

With the quick perceptions of insanity, he had caught the sound of an armed step approaching through the cloisters, and ere Mary had recovered from her dismay, a tall warlike figure bowed to its very sword-hilt before her, and she found herself face to face with the Warden of the Marches.

He had been riding all night to reach Holyrood. He had galloped on ahead of the best mounted of his troop, who were even now rounding the base of Arthur’s seat, as they neared the Scottish capital. In those troubled times there was no lack of excuses for the Warden to seek personal instructions from his Sovereign, and Bothwell had availed himself of some late misunderstanding with Lord Scrope, the Warden on the English side, to obtain an audience of the Queen. With a wild feverish longing for the sweet face, to behold which was fast becoming a necessity of his existence, he had hurried to the presence of his Sovereign. And now, when the moment had at last arrived, the colour faded in his bronzed cheek, and he trembled, that strong man-at-arms, like a girl.

Agitated and frightened as she was, Mary recovered herself sufficiently to receive him with becoming dignity. As his stalwart figure bent in homage, and the up-

turned face, with its manly features and fair short-curling beard, softened visibly beneath her glance, the Queen might well leave her hand in her subject's for an instant longer than the customs of a court required. He looked like a man who had both strength and will to help a woman at her need, and the bold border chief kissed the white hand that lay so gently in his own, with all the devotion of a worshipper kneeling before a saint.

'You are welcome, Bothwell,' said Mary, 'though you come, doubtless, to tell me of fresh disturbances on the border: fresh troubles to harass and perplex the Queen. The true heart and ready hand grow rare at Holyrood, and more and more welcome to Mary Stuart day by day.'

'I am but a plain soldier, Madam,' answered Bothwell. 'Your Majesty's need of me is at once my pride and my reward. It is nothing new to tell you that every drop of James Hepburn's blood belongs to his Queen.'

'I believe it,' answered Mary, smiling sadly; 'and yet even Bothwell's loyalty has this very morning been questioned. Nay,' she added, as the Earl started indignantly to his feet, 'I at least never doubted you for an instant.'

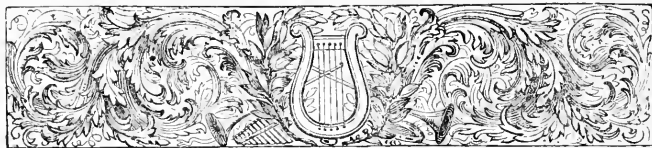
'I have but one answer to my accusers, Madam,' replied the Warden, pointing significantly to his sword. 'If a subject questions my loyalty, I can demand the ordeal. If my Sovereign suspects it,' he added, with a slight trembling in his voice, 'I can but give her my life to vindicate my honour.'

'Oh! Bothwell,' exclaimed Mary, 'would that all were like you. I have none to counsel me; none in whom I can trust; none to sympathize with me in my

loneliness, a widow and a Queen. To-day, in my bereavement and my affliction,' she added, reverting to the conduct of her courtiers which had so hurt and irritated her best feelings, 'not one of them had the decency to share in the mourning of their Sovereign. Even my Warden comes before me in his ordinary attire, but that is fairly excusable when it consists of corslet and head-piece hacked and dented in my service.'

'Say not so, Madam,' answered Bothwell, pointing to a sprig of willow worn in his basnet. 'I gathered yon sprig from the salallows that skirt its bank as I rode the water of Roslin in the misty dawn. I could not forget the day of my Queen's bereavement; and it shall never be told that Bothwell forbore to share the dangers or the sorrows of his Sovereign.'

The angry colour that had brightened it all the morning died out on Mary's cheek. She looked at the Earl stedfastly, while one might have counted ten; then her lip quivered. She turned her face away, and burst into tears.



CHAPTER IX.

“ To arms ! ” the citizens bellow—“ Alack !
These riders are loose in the town once more ! ”
But a good steel jack, and a friend to my back,
The Causeway I ’ll keep in the teeth of a score.
For never another can ruffle it here
Like the lads of the snaffle, spur, and spear, ’



WE have seen Bothwell in his harness,—the loyal nobleman, the true knight, the Warden of the Marches, and Lieutenant of the Borders in the service of his Queen. A different personage, in truth, from wild James Hepburn, with his father’s hot blood rioting in his veins, and his own propensities for evil, encouraged by a strong will and vigorous temperament, acting on a bad education, a weak brain, and a heart with just enough of good in it to make him lonely and unhappy.

Like his father, the profligate Earl Patrick, he was disposed by nature to take a leading part in all scenes of turbulence and strife ; unlike that father, his better feelings would sometimes be permitted to influence his policy, and weaken his determination. Earl Patrick seems to have had a happy facility of ignoring all

promises, bonds, and even oaths, when their observance became inconvenient, and would have scorned to allow his patriotism to stand for an hour in the way of his advancement. His son, with all his faults, was a Scotsman at heart, and perhaps, like many another whose fate has served to 'point a moral or adorn a tale,' it wanted but the difference of a hair's-breadth, at the right moment, to have made him as good as he turned out evil. Perhaps Bothwell's real sphere was riding his war-horse in mail and plate amongst the wild morasses of the Marches. Perhaps he was never so happy as when engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with some daring marauder, a stalwart man-at-arms like himself, lance-thrust and sword-stroke freely dealt and stoutly received with but little ill-will on either side. Whilst his foe was in the saddle, he would close with him gallantly, striking fiercely, and shouting, 'Queen Mary!' but down upon the heather the adversary of a moment ago became the helpless friend, to be set upon a horse and borne gently to Hermitage, there to be tended carefully till his wounds were cured, when he should be set free at a trifling ransom, to meet and fight it out again.

'Twas a wild adventurous life that of a southern Scottish nobleman in the days of the beautiful Stuart; yet not without its pleasures and its charm. He lived in his old keep, a petty monarch within his bounds; surrounded by adherents who would not scruple to shed every drop of their blood in the service of their chief. Bold, athletic, and self-reliant, he held his sway by the charter of his sword, he gained his revenues by the unfailing influence of 'snaffle, spur, and

spear.' For his relaxation he leapt on a good horse, and cast his hawk into the air by the side of many a green nook and fresh brawling stream, or holloed his hounds on the slot of the flying deer, scouring over the moorland, and bruising the fragrant heather beneath its hoofs. For the business of life, the same good horse came round to the door, champing under his steel frontlet; and the men-at-arms mustered on their bonny bay geldings with laugh and jest, and loud anticipations of plunder. The moon glinted coldly on steel jack and burnished head-piece as they clattered off, and the morning sun rose on the troop returning with its booty—driving jaded cattle before them with their long lances—encumbered with panting, foot-sore sheep—household plenishing on some of the saddles—armour hacked and besmirched—two or three bloody sconces beneath draggled plumes—and here and there a led horse coming masterless home.

But the life was at least one of manhood and adventure; a good training for a soldier, and an invigorating substitute for the debaucheries in which, under other circumstances, these bold spirits would have been prone to indulge. When a border-noble with his train, rode into Edinburgh, the vintner hugged himself in his snow-white apron, and the canny burgher made his doors fast ere it was yet twilight, and resolved that no shouts for help on the causeway should lure him at night from his chimney corner into the troubled street.

Walter Maxwell, proceeding quietly up the High-street, and ruminating, not too pleasantly, on his prospects, found himself accosted by his new friend,

‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh,’ as he was about to turn into his solitary lodging, and get through the evening as well as he could, reflecting on two unpleasant subjects—the continued coyness of his ladye-love and his own diminished fortunes, for his employment at the Scottish Court was more honourable than lucrative. To be in love usually makes a man unsociable; to be in debt often has a reverse effect. Maxwell, at all events, felt little disposed for an evening spent in his own company.

‘I’ve been the length of Holyrood to see for you!’ exclaimed the borderer with a boisterous welcome, ‘and here I happen on you like a deer, that’s ta’en the double when the blood-hound is off the slot. Come away, man, come away, the Warden’s gotten a grand spread the night, an’ I was bid to fetch ye, ’gin ye were in the Queen’s presence! And noo’ ye’ll just gang in wi’ me; ye ken we’ve an awfu’ grip, we Liddesdale lads! an’ I would like fine to see if ye can drink, man, as well as ye can fight. I’m thinkin’ little Jock Elliott’s no forgotten ye, Mr. Maxwell!’ and Dick laughed heartily at the recollection of his first acquaintance with his present companion.

Maxwell professed his readiness to accept the Earl’s invitation, and linking his arm in that of the stalwart henchman, proceeded in the direction of Bothwell’s lodging, the pair provoking no little ill-will from divers armed retainers in the street, who recognized the cognizance of the Hepburn, and some admiration from the maids and matrons of the old town, the latter especially approving of Dick’s stalwart proportions and comely good-natured face.

'Yon's a proper man!' observed a stout dame with her arms akimbo, to a dishevelled and dirty lady emptying a pail of water scarcely more dirty than herself.

'He's no that ill,' replied the other, desisting from her operations to push back her tangled locks, that she might have a good look. 'Lass!' she added in shrill impressive tones, 'he's a godless borderer. I ken them fine by their 'spauld-pieces.* He'll get his licks the night I'm thinkin', an' muckle guid may they do till him! It's no sae saft lyin' on the causeway as doun amang the moss-hags at hame!' After which ill-omened sentiment, she retired abruptly, shutting her door with a bang.

Honest Dick, however, took no notice of these and other less unpleasant remarks, but strode boldly on, discoursing, between bursts of merriment, on the encounter with little Jock Elliott, an assault of which he seemed to entertain a highly facetious remembrance.

'In here man,' said he, turning up one of those offshoots from the main-street, which is termed to this day 'a close,' and dragging Maxwell after him with obvious glee. 'I ken the place fine by the weather-marks forenent the wa'. It's an awfu' town this for a body to lose theirsel'! There's runnin' water too to guide a man,' pointing to a sluggish stream of filth that trickled under their feet, 'but it's no that clear that it is in Liddesdale. Up the stair, man; yer' welcome, nae fears!'

As Maxwell entered the apartment, a long low room

* Plates of steel that defended the arm and shoulder.

plainly furnished and crowded with armed men, he was cordially greeted by the Earl's retainers, who had mustered in great force. They had seen his hand keep his head, against heavy odds, and they warmed to him at once as a kindred nature. Their meal seemed to be concluded, but the serious part of the entertainment was yet to commence, and large jacks of strong ale with flasks of wine, standing at no great intervals on the board, denoted ample means of quenching the thirst engendered by a long ride. The Warden rose to greet his new guest with frank courtesy, and bade him to the upper end of the room, where he himself sat at a cross table surrounded by the most distinguished of his guests.

Bothwell had doffed his usual attire of steel jack and head-piece; he was now dressed in close-fitting doublet and hose, which set off the strong proportions of his figure to great advantage. Without pretensions to strict personal beauty, the Warden had fine features, and a bold, frank bearing, not unpleasing. Though he had lost one of his eyes in a skirmish, the defect was scarcely observable, and the slight scar left by the wound on his cheek and eye-brow rather added to the characteristic expression of his face. It was that of a daring, perhaps a reckless man, one who was inured to danger and used to strife, yet was there something soft and even tender in his smile. Flushed with wine, and exchanging broad jests of the coarsest, with his laughing guests, he looked a fitting leader in a revel or a charge, and yet a close observer would have detected a hollow ring in the loud laugh, a false note in the jovial

strain, a capability for better things than feasting and fighting, and a self-accusing consciousness that it was lost and thrown away.

The mirth was at its highest. If Bothwell was splendidly dressed, his costume was but sombre when compared with that of his princely guest, the Marquis d'Elbœuf, who shone with satin and jewellery in all the florid brilliancy of French decoration. If the Warden's draughts were deep, and his toasts objectionable, the Lords John and Robert Stuart, the Queen's half-brothers, pledged him freely and out-talked him shamelessly, with a happy mixture of juvenile thirst and royal audacity. When Maxwell took his seat at the upper table, amidst these and two or three more of the wilder gallants of the Court, the wine had circulated freely, and the spirits of the party had risen to that point at which discretion ceases to interfere, and reason begins to discover that she has been all day in the wrong. D'Elbœuf flung himself into the spirit of the scene with the keen zest of his nation. The Admiral of France was the last man to refuse a challenge from friend or foe.

'You shall pledge me in turn, Bothwell,' said he, filling a large silver measure with wine. 'Every man of you shall do me reason. These wild lads, who ought to be nephews of my own, and who drink as if they were grandsons of Charlemagne; Mr. Maxwell, there, who has just come in, and must be suffocated with thirst; your huge squire of the body, who might hold a cask; and all your gentlemen riders, rovers on land, as their chief used to be at sea. What, Count Both-

well? We have not forgotten the breeze off shore and the bold Norwegian coast.'

'Nay, Marquis,' answered Bothwell, filling himself a bumper, 'my Liddesdale lads will drink any toast you please if they like the liquor. But down on the Marches we have a saying that "he who rides in the dark should dismount before daylight," and faith, now that I am on shore, I have forgotten all about the coast of Norway and the wild North Sea, once for all.'

'The toast! the toast!' exclaimed Lord John Stuart. 'Let us have the drink first, Marquis, and the tale of the Warden's wicked doings afterwards. There's something in this wine that makes a man marvellously thirsty.'

'Waifs and strays!' replied the Marquis, holding his beaker above his head. 'Count Bothwell first taught me the rights of an Admiral on neutral seas. Pledge me, gentlemen, the toast is quite in your own line;' and d'Elbœuf, laughing heartily, set his cup on the board—empty.

A dark flush swept over Bothwell's brow. A man does not always like to be reminded of his past exploits, but the company were clamorous for an explanation of the Frenchman's toast, and d'Elbœuf had drunk too much wine to disappoint them.

'We were lying off the coast of Norway,' said the Admiral, 'and our host here in his armed galliot, with the Lion of Scotland at the main, was never tired of cruising about in search of adventures. He was Admiral of Scotland, as I of France; but whilst I waited for Fortune, I think he followed the jade and grasped

her by the hair. Some pirates had fired a village and were carrying off the inhabitants, when your Warden here caught the knaves, red-handed, in the bay;—we make short work with these gentry at sea, where ropes are so convenient, and he strung them up to the yard-arm by dozens, like Normandy apples on a tree. The poor captives were too rejoiced to go back to the ashes of their dwellings; but a breeze springing up from the land, our friend here was obliged to make sail, carrying off, inadvertently, two or three trifles belonging to the village; amongst others a fair girl with blue eyes and golden hair who had once inhabited the principal house. I was on board the galliot some six weeks afterwards at an entertainment given by our host, where we drank nearly as much wine as we are like to do to-night, and this fair lass filled my cup and emptied her own nothing loth, as though she relished her wine and her company. “But shall you not send her back?” said I to my host, seeing that she had been already six weeks on board. “Shall you not send her back before her friends lose patience and a complaint is made at Court and a coil, all for a pair of merry eyes and a wisp of yellow hair?” “Not yet,” answered your Warden. “Not yet. Do you not know that waifs and strays belong to the Admiral?”’

A loud laugh followed d’Elbœuf’s explanation. The sentiment was quite in accordance with the company, and the point of his narrative, turning as it did on an act of illegal appropriation, was hugely enjoyed by the carousing borderers.

There were two exceptions, however, to the general

merriment. Bothwell looked grave, more sorrowful, perhaps, than displeased, and honest 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh,' smiting a sledge-hammer fist on the table that made the beakers leap again, burst out,

'Puir lassie! It's ill liftin' a bairn from the ingle or a lamb from the fauld!'

The wine was, by this time, producing its effect on the company. The men-at-arms were beginning to flush and talk thick, descanting without much regard for listeners on the merits of their horses and their own prowess, both in fighting and carrying off the property of their neighbours; the latter branch of their profession being obviously esteemed equally honourable with, and the natural prelude to, or consequence of, the former. Even Maxwell's brain was somewhat heated, albeit he was naturally of a temperament on which wine is slow to take effect, and his late arrival had spared him some of the pledges of the borderers, although, to do them justice, they evinced a most hospitable desire to make up for lost time. Bothwell, too, who had been plunged in gloomy fits of abstraction, and who seemed to rouse himself with difficulty from some engrossing subject of meditation, was now getting as hilarious as the rest. D'Elbœuf was full of smiles and spirits and scraps of French songs, somewhat wasted on his audience; whilst Lord John, whose ruling passion was of course in the ascendant, proposed gravely to dance a measure amongst the jugs and drinking cups on the table, and actually mounted a chair as the first step towards that difficult performance.

At this juncture, a ray of moonlight streaming

through the narrow windows, athwart the glare of lamps and torches, gave a new turn to the impulses of the merry-makers.

‘It’ll be a bra’ night this in Liddesdale,’ observed ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh,’ who was given to sentiment in his cups.

‘A rare night for a foray!’ exclaimed Lord Robert, producing from the interior of his bonnet two or three black velvet masks such as were then frequently worn in cities by both sexes.

‘Shall we have a cruise, Admiral?’ said Bothwell. ‘I doubt not I can find you in vizards, for you and I are both well enough known in Edinburgh to meet fewer friends than foes.’

D’Elbœuf agreed cordially to the proposal. Like his countrymen in general, he was averse to continuous hard-drinking, and a night of adventure in the town was more to his taste than a steady carouse with these inexhaustible borderers. His host, too, appeared in the restless mood of a man who has some secret pain goading him to action. The more he drank, the fiercer seemed to grow the impulse to be doing. When the arch-tempter wants a tool that shall be at once keen and strong, he takes a bold vigorous nature; he humbles it in its own eyes; he wounds it in its best affections; he whispers ‘do to others as *they have done* unto you;’ then he tempers it in the furnace of memory, and sharpens it carefully on the grindstone of remorse; finally, he steeps it in rough strong wine; after that it is fit for anything, and will cut through steel harness and muslin fold with vindictive impartiality.

Masks for the party were soon produced in sufficient number, and these, with their cloaks or plaids, would be disguise enough in the event of the night's amusement growing to a breach of the laws, such being by no means an unlikely result. The Warden desired his retainers to sit still and continue drinking till his return, directions with which they showed no unwillingness to comply; but as the masked party, brandishing their torches, shouting, singing, and laughing, descended the stair into the close, 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' whispered to Maxwell to get his sword and accompany him.

'There'll be mair pows than ane crackit the night, or all's done,' remarked the borderer. 'The Warden's no canny when he's crossit. Aince the whingars be oot, I'm no thinkin' muckle o' yon' French-man, an' thae wild lads is clean wud wi' drink. We'll be nane the waur o' a decent body like yoursel', Mr. Maxwell, just to strike in an' see fair play.'

With the exception of a slight delay in the close to witness Lord John's performance of his promised horn-pipe, the effect of which was somewhat marred by the gutter traversing the pavement, nothing occurred to check the progress of the rioters. Save for themselves, the street lay utterly quiet and deserted in the cold moonlight. The party, linking arms, reeled and swagged on, followed at no long interval by 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' and Maxwell, both tolerably sober.

Presently Bothwell halted at the door of the only house from which lights were shining.

'What say you, gentlemen?' laughed the Warden. 'I know master Craig, the mercer, well. It seems that

he is expecting us. Shall we go in and take our re-supper with pretty mistress Alison, his daughter?’

‘By all means!’ exclaimed d’Elbœuf. ‘The best-dressed damsel that walks the High-street on Sundays. I should know her anywhere by the orange stripes on her farthingale.’

‘And the bonniest lass on Leith Sands at the merry-making to-day,’ added Lord Robert. ‘I little thought when I gave her her fairings this morning, I should sup with her to-night!’

‘The neatest foot and the tightest stocking in the Old Town,’ said Lord John, ‘and the best dancer to boot. Knock at the door, Bothwell, and bid them let us in, in the devil’s name!’

Concealing themselves under the wall of the house, the party waited with much stifled merriment, the result of Bothwell’s application for admittance.

His cautious knock was at first unanswered, but on repetition the light was observed to be obscured at one of the windows, and a female head scarcely so well arranged as that of mistress Alison herself, was thrust into the moonlight, the owner demanding in a guarded whisper, ‘What’s your wull?’

‘Go down and unbar the door,’ answered Bothwell, in like tones of secrecy, and pulling his mask carefully over his face. ‘We have come to sup with your mistress.’

‘It’s the Earl!’ the girl was heard to say, turning round obviously to hold parley with some one in the room; and then another voice whispered in softer tones, ‘Is it you, my lord?’

‘Why of course it is!’ answered Bothwell, some-

what surprised, nevertheless, that he should be so easily recognised.

‘I have expected you this hour and more,’ was the reply, as the two figures moved at once from the window.

‘The devil you have!’ observed the Warden, now completely puzzled; ‘then why don’t you come down and open the door?’

Presently bars were heard to be withdrawn, and the party of rioters, if we may so term them, marshalled themselves in close order, prepared if necessary to go in with a rush. The door, however, was only partially unclosed, and the figure of a strapping serving-wench guarded the narrow interstice. She seemed less satisfied than her mistress, and inclined to hold further parley.

‘Hoo will I ken it’s you?’ said she, shading the candle with her large coarse hand.

But the caution was too late. Lord John’s shoulder was by this time applied to the door. Lord Robert blew out the candle, and the Admiral of France, with characteristic gallantry and national politeness, stifled the outcry of the astonished damsel in the dark.

The assailants had now gained the body of the place, still keeping their masks on, and with noiseless footsteps they ascended the stair; Maxwell and ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh,’ who had neither of them much stomach for the adventure, remaining at the door to keep watch.

The others turned into a comfortable parlour in which fire and lights were burning, as if to make them thoroughly at home. A delicate little supper, with a flask or two of wine, stood on the table, and a very smartly

dressed lady, not without beauty of a bold imposing style, rose to welcome them.

As Bothwell entered, this gaudy-looking dame seemed about to rush into his arms, but observing that he did not remove his mask, and was accompanied by three or four others, she checked herself, and remained standing in the middle of the room as if not altogether mistress of the position.

The Warden, bowing low, advanced to take her hand, and mistress Alison suffered him to do so, with an expression of ludicrous uncertainty on her handsome face.

‘Will you not unmask, my lord?’ said she; ‘though late you are welcome, and so are your friends. Why did you bring them with you?’ she added in a troubled whisper.

It was impossible to carry on the deception any longer; and by this time the laughter of the party had been so long smothered as to defy further restraint. With many apologies, and courtly compliments, and honied phrases, interrupted by bursts of merriment, one and all unmasked, disclosing to the bewildered mistress Alison the features of quite another earl from her expected guest, and of three or four of the wildest gallants at Holyrood, with whom nevertheless she was not entirely unacquainted.

One of the most beautiful qualities in woman is her pliant nature, her tendency to adapt herself to circumstances: the readiness with which in the absence of white bread, she contents herself with brown. Of this amiable facility the mercer’s daughter now afforded a striking instance. Bidden or unbidden, *here* were the

gallants,—good-looking, amusing, and well-dressed; and *there* was the supper. Mistress Alison did not hesitate long.

‘You will not depart without breaking bread,’ said she, pointing to the well-covered table, with courteous hospitality.

Lord Robert filled himself a bumper on the spot.

‘Pledge us, fair mistress Alison!’ said he; ‘a cup of wine will restore the bloom to that damask cheek, paled with the alarm of our sudden arrival.’

The lady drank and smiled. It is but fair to observe that, notwithstanding his lordship’s polite fiction, the ‘damask cheek’ had never paled, nor mistress Alison lost her presence of mind for an instant. Perhaps she was not entirely unused to these impromptu supper-parties.

Merrily they sat down, heaping their cloaks, and swords, and masks, in the corner of the room, their hostess only stipulating against too much noise, and insisting that her guests should not disturb the repose of the honest mercer who slept above.

Mistress Alison seemed tolerably familiar with the private history of her company, and the general gossip of the Court. As she displayed the turn of her round arm, and close-fitting boddice, while filling plates and drinking-cups, she had a jeer, or a sarcasm, or a compliment for each. She congratulated d’Elbœuf on the conquest he had made of her serving-woman who, never having seen a live Frenchman before, gazed at the Admiral open-mouthed. She twitted the two Stuarts with their approaching bondage that should put an end to all such midnight pranks.

‘For,’ said mistress Alison, ‘in less than a week, ye’ll both be dancing in fetters to the tune of “Wooded and married and a’,” and the bonny brides will have gotten the two most graceless gallants in Scotland for their grooms; and as sure as death I’ll see the wedding if I creep into the palace through the buttery-window! Aye, my Lord Bothwell! you’re bold riders, you Hepburns; but the bonny lass that thinks to tame wild John Stuart is the boldest amongst you all. Well, well! it’s a good steed that’ll gallop till dawn. Once she gets into the saddle, she’ll daunton* him, never fear!’

A loud laugh rewarded this sally at the expense of the young noblemen, who were indeed making the most of their remaining hours of freedom; and Lord John, who was about to marry Bothwell’s sister, was so delighted with the conversation, that he took mistress Alison’s hand and proposed that they should dance a measure together on the spot.

But the lady had no intention that her agreeable visitors should remain for too long a period. In the midst of her mirth she had never entirely got rid of a certain air of apprehension, and twice or thrice she had stopped in the middle of a sentence, as if to listen. All at once she turned pale, *really* pale this time, and set her goblet down untasted.

‘For any sake! my lord,’ she exclaimed, with an imploring look at Bothwell, ‘go your ways now. I can let you down the back stair. Go your ways, gentlemen,

* Daunton, to tame; or familiarly, to cow: from the French *dompter*.

I entreat you, or there will be blood spilt before all's done !'

Already the tramp of feet and altercation of voices had been heard in the street ; now the clink of steel fell familiarly on the ears of the guests upstairs. They rose to their feet, and commenced buckling on their swords simultaneously.

'We are, indeed, fortunate,' observed d'Elbœuf in high glee ; 'a jovial carouse, a delightful supper-party, and a midnight fray, all without the slightest trouble or inconvenience.'

'For the love of mercy begone !' pleaded mistress Alison, pushing them, one after another, to the door. 'For *my* sake, for *any* sake, for *all* our sakes ! They're breaking in the door ! They're coming up the stair ! It's the Earl, as sure as death it's the Earl !'

'What Earl ?' laughed Bothwell carelessly, and yet curious to know the name of the favoured nobleman for whom the supper they had just eaten was prepared.

'The Earl of Arran, of course !' replied mistress Alison, blushing through her tears. 'It's too late now, for their swords are out and their blood up, and the street full of the red-handed Hamiltons ! What will I do ? What will I do ?'

Pending further measures, mistress Alison covered her head with her mantle, and cried piteously.

Bothwell smiled grimly in his beard when he heard the name of Arran. They were none of the best of friends, the Hepburns and the Hamiltons, at any time. To-night the Warden's heart thrilled with a fierce

pleasure at the thought of crossing swords with their chieftain's son.

'Draw gentlemen,' exclaimed Bothwell, putting himself at the head of the party. 'A Hepburn! a Hepburn to the rescue! draw, and follow me!'

Thus shouting, he rushed to the stair-head, followed by his friends, who appeared, one and all, as ready for the fray as they had proved themselves for the feast.

The door had, indeed, been broken open, but the narrow entrance was still filled, and stoutly defended by the stalwart figure of the Warden's henchman. Though the odds were fearfully against him, his great strength and familiarity with his weapon had enabled him to make a gallant defence against the assailants who were closing round him. At the first alarm (and the borderer's quick ear had caught the step of armed men approaching long before they came in sight) he had entreated Maxwell to return for the assistance of his comrades, who were sure to be found still carousing in Bothwell's lodging. That gentleman used his own discretion in preferring to turn out the city-guard, but of this intention the other was ignorant. 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' never doubted he could keep the door single-handed till assistance should arrive.

Thrust and blow and parry succeeded each other with fearful rapidity. The borderer was long of limb, and in capital wind; moreover, his heart was as true as the steel in his hand, but three or four to one will beat the best of swordsmen, and he was overpowered at last, and driven back towards the stair.

At this crisis a desperate charge of fresh combatants,

led by Bothwell from above, came opportunely to the rescue. It cleared the hall and the door, which was instantaneously closed and barred by the ready-witted serving-woman. Assailants and assailed now found themselves carrying on the combat in the street.

The skirmish became general. The Hamiltons mustered in force, and came swarming to the assistance of their kinsmen. Bothwell's riders, too, disturbed from their carouse, arrived by twos and threes, and the superiority of their arms and training, made them formidable partizans. Inured, as all Scotsmen were in those days, to blows and bloodshed, strife was the natural element of the borderer; and, drunk or sober, he was always ready for a fight.

The old town was soon disturbed from its repose—peaceful citizens leaped from their beds, and ran to the windows; night-capped heads were thrust out into the moonlight to watch the tumult in the street below, as it waved backwards and forwards in the vicissitudes of the struggle. There was but little outcry, for men's passions were thoroughly aroused, and they were fighting to the death. Sometimes a hollow groan, or a heavy fall on the stones contrasted dully with the scuffle of feet and the clash of steel. Sometimes a fierce oath accompanied a shrewder blow than common, or a deadly thrust that had been driven desperately home; but there were few shots exchanged, and in the hand-to-hand conflict, the Hamiltons were gradually losing ground.

Once Bothwell succeeded in reaching his enemy, and exchanged a couple of passes with Arran, but the

Hamiltons rallied round their chieftain's son, and the Warden, grinding his teeth with rage, was compelled to forego his revenge.

Several wounded, and more than one corpse encumbered the street; the fray was getting serious, and even 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' seemed to think it was an affair more of business than pleasure, when the common bell began to toll loudly, and the city-guard, guided by Walter Maxwell, and commanded by no less a personage than Lord James Stuart himself, made its appearance on the scene.

These hardy burghers, well armed, and confident in the sympathies, and if necessary, the assistance of the towns-folk, thrust themselves boldly between the combatants. Lord James, on whose thoughtful brow could be traced no more excitement than ordinary, himself striking up the weapons of either party, as he bade them lay down their arms in the Queen's name.

Bothwell had just reached Arran for the second time. The Warden's eye glared wickedly, and the froth was white on his moustache. Arran, pale as death, and with madness flaring in his looks, struggled to meet his enemy, shouting wildly and incoherently in a paroxysm of insanity.

Their swords had actually crossed when Lord James struck in between. His face was calm and unmoved; nay, there was a lurking satisfaction in his eye, for, to the plotting diplomatist, there is always gain in the differences of the powerful; but to-night it was Lord James's cue rather to stifle than foment such dissensions, and he wished also to stand well with the citizens by quelling a disturbance that had alarmed the town.

‘For shame, gentlemen!’ said he, beating down their weapons with the sheathed sword. ‘For shame! you, Arran, her near kinsman! and you, Bothwell, in whom she trusts. What will the Queen say when she hears of it?’

The red blood faded from the Warden’s angry brow at Mary Stuart’s name, and sinking the point of his sword, he fell back with a look of deep shame and contrition. In his fiercest moments that spell was sufficient to make him docile as a child.

Not so Arran. With a wild shriek of rage, he darted a savage thrust at the peace-maker, that had it taken effect, might have spared Scotland much bloodshed and Mary Stuart many a tear, for her wily bastard-brother would never have moved again. It was not fated, however, to reach its object, for ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh’s’ quick eye caught the movement, and he parried it with a force and rapidity that shivered Arran’s blade in pieces, and beat it from his hand. His retainers now gathered round their leader, and forced him from the ground, the unfortunate maniac raving and writhing in their grasp.

Bothwell, too, got his men in order, and withdrew them, submitting patiently to the rebukes of Lord James. It is needless to observe that on the first appearance of their grave brother, the Lords John and Robert had taken to flight, closely followed by d’Elbœuf, who did not wish to figure as a brawler at his niece’s court. The Warden alone remained to bear the blame, and now that the excitement had cooled, he bitterly regretted what he had done.

As he was followed by his henchman, Lord James called the latter back.

‘Let me look in your face, good fellow,’ said he; ‘you have saved my life to-night.’

‘The redder’s lick is aye the warst in the fray,’ answered the other good-humouredly; ‘and doubtless your honour was no takin’ notice, and it must have gone clean through ye,’ he added dogmatically.

‘You have saved my life,’ repeated Lord James. ‘I leave no scores unpaid for good or evil, and if ever the time should come, I shall not forget the debt I owe you.’

But ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh’ shook his head doubtfully. ‘I’m no sae dooms sure o’ that,’ said he, as he strode on after his chief. ‘An’ I wad like ill to be beholden to a man that could part sic a bonny fray. Oh, man!’ he added to Maxwell, who had now joined him, ‘what garred ye bring in the burgher-guard? The drink was just dyin’ out in our lads, and we wad ha’ gotten the grandest ploy I’ve seen sin’ I cam’ out of Carlisle gaol.’



CHAPTER X.

'Away! away! thou traitor strang!
Out o' my sicht soon mayst thou be!
I granted never a traitor grace,
And now I'll not begin with thee.'

T was with no agreeable feelings that Maxwell received a summons to attend the Council at Holyrood the morning after the fray. Ere he had well slept off the fatigues and dissipation of the previous night, he was disturbed by a pursuivant in the royal livery, with the lion emblazoned on his surcoat, who required his immediate presence at the palace, and from whose rigid sense of duty he found it difficult to extort permission to summon 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' as a witness in his favour.

Maxwell reflected that the borderer's straightforward testimony would serve to exonerate him from any share in the disturbance except the measures which put a stop to it; and by dint of argument, remonstrance, and a bonnet-piece or two, he succeeded in sending a message to Bothwell himself, who, for reasons of his own, was only too ready to dispatch his henchman in reply.

As they proceeded together towards the palace, attended by the pursuivant and four stout men-at-arms,

‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh’ could by no means be brought to consider their past broil in the light of a breach of the peace. On the contrary, he esteemed it from beginning to end as the simple and natural consequence of a jaunt to the capital, and was fully persuaded that their present expedition must result in a vote of praise to all concerned.

Yet the borderer’s iron nerves seemed affected as they entered the precincts of the Abbey. He was unusually restless, and glanced hither and thither, as though in expectation. Certain female tones in the garden by no means restored his composure; and while Maxwell, with a thrill of offended pride, that was yet longing to forgive, recognized Mary Carmichael’s well-known voice, Dick nudged him vigorously with his elbow, and whispered,

‘Ye’ll hae to speak up for the twae o’ us, Mr. Maxwell. I was aye dashed wi’ the women-folk;—an’ it’s like they’ll no let us away the day without gettin’ a sight o’ the Queen and her leddies. Man! I would like fine to see them in their brows!’

Ere Walter could reply, a gentleman-usher beckoned him silently to advance, while two stout men-at-arms, crossing their axes in front of his follower, gave ‘Dick-o’-the-Cleugh’ to understand he must wait till he was sent for. Unusual vigilance seemed to pervade the palace. The guard was doubled on the staircase and in the galleries, whilst a strong body of cavalry occupied the court.

As Maxwell’s conductors halted at the door of the council-chamber, the former felt his wonted composure sadly disturbed by the appearance of Mary Carmichael,

who was crossing from the garden towards the Queen's apartments. She started and blushed vividly when she met his eye, and then observing him to be under escort, turned pale with obvious apprehension. She stopped, too, as if she would fain speak with him; but, after an imploring glance that seemed to entreat his forgiveness, and assure him of her sympathy, hurried away.

So strangely constituted is the human mind, even in those who most pride themselves on their philosophy, that Maxwell felt his heart lighter than it had been for a week, and entered the awful presence of the Council without the slightest appearance of dismay; and yet he had not exchanged a syllable with her,—had only caught her eye for an instant, and heard the rustle of her garments as she passed. Surely there is some strange magic in our nature that works below the surface, and encircles the bravest and the strongest in its spells.

In the centre of the room which Maxwell now entered, stood a massive oak table, covered with papers and parchments, prepared for the sign-manual of Mary Stuart. Around it were seated those Scottish noblemen, whose turn it was to assist the deliberations of their Sovereign, thwarting indeed her free-will, and impeding her resolutions, yet constituting and considering themselves the trusty advisers of the Crown.

The Duke of Chatelhêrault, in right of his high rank and royal lineage, acted as president; and on his noble brow might be traced an expression of puzzled vexation as he followed in vain Secretary Maitland's rapid and masterly explanation of the business in hand. That astute diplomatist, carrying his colleagues triumphantly with him, was furnishing a brilliant display

of rhetorical fire-works, to prove that the measure he now advocated, (which had indeed for its object the placing of additional power in Lord James Stuart's hands,) was the only possibility of saving the country; and the haughty Hamilton, dazzled rather than enlightened by his eloquence, looked as dissatisfied as a man generally does who is 'convinced against his will.'

The Queen's brother had assumed a modest and deprecating air, as who should say, 'I seek not authority, but only wish rigidly to fulfil the duties that are thrust upon me,'—a sentiment he had already expressed to the Council when they sat down. The others listened in different attitudes of attention or approval, according as their interests or their convictions led them to agree with the speaker; whilst Mary herself, whose chair was drawn a little apart from the table, looked up from her embroidery ever and anon in the face of her half-brother, with an expression of perfect confidence and affection. Though her noble intellect might detect many a flaw in her Secretary's arguments, she was too thoroughly a woman not to be a *dishonest reasoner*; and of all the intriguers who backed Lord James in his efforts at supreme power, none supported him so fearlessly and confidingly as the Queen.

David Riccio sat, so to speak, under Her Majesty's wing; his evident favour with his mistress extorted for him a certain outward deference and cold civility from the nobles, but he was already inclined to put himself too forward, without reflecting that the key of a lady's *escritoire* is but a frail weapon to meet a two-handed sword, and a velvet doublet, a poor defence against the blow of a dudgeon-dagger.

When Maxwell was admitted, the State Secretary had just concluded his peroration, and was shuffling his papers together on the table with an air of business-like satisfaction. He looked up at this new arrival, however, with calm indifference, and spreading a blank sheet of paper before him, appeared ready to enter at once upon a new affair with fresh energy and attention.

Lord Ruthven, whose temper was none of the sweetest, and whose liking for the Warden was of that kind which would fain have had a yard-and-a-half of green turf, and the same measure of cold steel, between them, scowled upon Bothwell's kinsman with all the ferocity of which his stern features were capable, a compliment returned by Maxwell with a stare of undaunted defiance. Morton stole a rapid and sinister glance at the Queen, while his beard curled with his habitual sneering smile. Huntley, Argyle, and the rest, settled themselves into comfortable attitudes, as though the more important business of the morning were now disposed of.

The Duke of Chatelhêrault, as the aggrieved person, was the first to speak. With a haughty affectation of indifference, he asked,

‘Who is this witness? Is he of gentle birth?’

And being informed by Maitland that he was a kinsman of Earl Bothwell, his Grace replied indignantly,

‘An impartial witness ye have brought before the Council! Why not examine the Earl himself? if, indeed, he acknowledges any authority but border-law. It is well that the Hamiltons can right themselves with their own good swords.’

Maitland cut short his further objections by desiring Maxwell to proceed with his account of the fray, while

the Queen looked up from her work as if about to expostulate, but checked herself with a half-smothered sigh.

Maxwell told his tale simply and frankly. It was obvious that the fray had originated in a brawl begun by the Hamiltons, who had insisted on forcing their way into mistress Alison's house. Seeing that bloodshed was unavoidable he had hurried off to alarm the civic guard, leaving the Earl's henchman at the door. When he returned, the skirmish, as Lord James could corroborate, was at its height. The henchman could speak to what took place during the narrator's absence; he had craved permission to bring him to Holyrood for that purpose.

His manly straightforward evidence seemed to make a favourable impression on the Council. Maitland looked up from his notes, and, glancing at the Duke for approval, desired the borderer to be summoned.

Honest Dick entered the council chamber with an undaunted front till he caught sight of the Queen, when he blushed up to his ears and made a profound and exceedingly awkward obeisance. Then he looked about as if in search of something, and finally stood bolt upright, like a man prepared to be 'shot at.'

'Your name,' said the Duke, haughtily.

Dick reflected a few moments, and then answered with the air of one who makes an admission under protest,

'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh.'

'Your calling,' added the President severely.

'Just a rider,' answered Dick, after another pause.

The nobles glanced significantly at each other, and Huntley observed with a smile,

‘That is another word for thief in your country, is it not?’

Dick looked extremely demure and unconscious as he replied,

‘Na, it’s broken men they ca’ thieves on the Border—just like Catherans an’ Gordons an’ that in the North.’

The Council could not forbear a laugh, and even the Queen bent over her work to conceal her amusement.

‘Faith, Huntley, he shivered his lance fairly against thy breast-plate this time,’ said Lord Seton; and Huntley, throwing his portly person back in his chair, vowed good-humouredly that the definition was a sufficiently precise one at either extremity of the kingdom.

The borderer’s examination then proceeded.

‘Was it by your chief’s orders that you defended the door in the High-street last night?’

‘I took nae orders yestreen frae the Warden,’ replied Dick, ‘forbye to see to the naigs about our back-coming.’

‘Would you have ventured to draw upon the Earl of Arran—upon my son,’ asked the Duke, ‘without your chief’s express commands to slay him if you came across him?’

‘I ken your Grace fine,’ answered the borderer, not very directly, ‘seein’ you’re the grandest nobleman in Scotland; but if yon was the Earl of Arran an’ a’ your Grace’s blood fight like yon camsteary chiel, I wad like ill to keep the causeway anither nicht frae the Hamiltons.’

‘What was the origin of the disturbance?’ here interposed Secretary Maitland, seeing that the discussion produced no obvious results. ‘Who began the brawl, man, and first bared steel?’

‘I could not say,’ replied Dick, looking profoundly ignorant. ‘I’m thinkin’ the stramash was a’ in gude fellowship till his Honour here, the Lord James an’ the city-guard struck in an’ spoilt all.’

‘Why, you yourself were at half-sword with a score of them when I came up,’ said Lord James, laughing in spite of himself, at the borderer’s coolness.

‘Oo! that was just a ploy!’ answered Dick, with a grin of delight at the recollection. ‘I’ve seen waur licks than you gi’en an’ ta’en in Bewcastle markit, just for gude-will ye ken, an’ a tass or twa o’ brandy.’

‘Let him go,’ said the Duke, ‘till we send for him again. It is not against this faithful knave, your Majesty and my lords, that I appeal for justice, but against the Earl of Bothwell.’

Again Morton shot a lurid glance at the Queen, whose white fingers were travelling fast to and fro through her embroidery.

‘The Earl had entered the house peacefully enough when I left,’ began Maxwell, but he was sternly and peremptorily commanded to hold his peace, whilst a whispered consultation was carried on by the chief nobility present, in which Lord James alone took no part.

The Queen, with an angry spot on each cheek, continued to work very fast.

‘It is but a part of the plot against Her Majesty’s person,’ said the Duke, after a while, ‘a plot which

my son himself has discovered, and which on his recovery he will prove on the Earl of Bothwell's body with his blade. Meantime, there lies my glove; if the Hepburn has a friend, let him take it up!

Maxwell interposed eagerly.

'To any one of my own degree,' he began; but an imploring glance from the Queen at her brother had roused that statesman from his apathy, and he interfered.

'Take back your glove, my Lord Duke!' said he. 'This is no affair of private brawl, but a matter in which the safety of the Crown is involved. My lords, I move for a committee of inquiry on the spot.'

The Duke bit his glove through, ere he replaced it on his hand, and then with moody brow and angry eye, listened in silence to the conference.

'I move that James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, be committed to ward till such time as he can purge himself from the charges brought against him by the Earl of Arran,' said Lord Ruthven, after another brief consultation, with a smile of triumph on his pale gaunt face.

With the exception of Seton and Argyle, who seemed to think the Warden was receiving scant justice, and a weak remonstrance from Lord James, which yielded gracefully to the urgency of the case, the Council agreed upon this precautionary measure, and it was carried accordingly.

Secretary Maitland made out the warrant for the Earl's committal; it wanted but the Queen's signature to become valid.

Mary rose from her chair and drew up her majestic figure.

‘Nay, my lords,’ said she. ‘It is surely unjust to condemn the absent without proof. Let the Warden return to his charge on the Border. He may render himself at any time in less than twenty-four hours from Hermitage.’

‘You cannot refuse to ratify the deed of your Council!’ urged Ruthven, fiercely. ‘Nay, Madam, you *dare* not,’ he added, with growing insolence; and would have said more, but Mary shot a glance at him, before which even his rugged nature quailed.

‘Your Majesty’s confidence in the Earl is greater than that of your advisers,’ observed Morton, not deigning to conceal a sneer. ‘Already he boasts of his influence over the Queen, and vows that steel gauntlet shall not wrest him from Holyrood, though a white glove can lure him from Hermitage.’

The colour rose on Mary’s brow, and her bosom heaved quickly. It was evident the Queen was wavering.

‘It is but a measure of precaution,’ argued Maitland, in his plausible off-hand tones, spreading at the same time the warrant before his Sovereign. ‘After all,’ he added, ‘it may be but a mere brawl about a wench! The Earl of Bothwell has ever been given to such follies overmuch.’

The Queen signed the paper hastily; then threw the pen on the table, and walked in silence from the council chamber.



CHAPTER XI.

'Oh! better for me that a blind-born child
Never a line I had learned to trace,
Than thus by a look and a laugh beguiled,
To have read my doom in fair Alice's face.

'And better for me to have made my bed
Under the yews where my fathers sleep,
Calm and quiet, at rest with the dead,
Than have given my heart to fair Alice to keep.'

SO Bothwell was committed to ward in Edinburgh Castle, yet was his durance but of a temporary nature, and devoid of the customary rigours that accompany imprisonment. The Warden made no effort to escape, although he had a strong party of friends about the Court, and might at any time have created considerable disturbance had he chosen to resist the royal authority; but he bowed his head to the blast with unexpected humility and a submission, the result of mixed motives. He lived in daily expectation of release by the Queen's own authority. His appointment on the Border had not yet been filled up, and Hermitage was still occupied by a staunch garrison who acknowledged no law but their chief's behests. Day by day did the war-

like Earl, pining, as well he might, for the free breeze on his brow and the swinging gallop of his steed, reflect on the effect which such devotion as his could not fail to produce on the Queen. Danger he had always faced readily for her sake; fatigue he had cheerfully endured, and now he submitted patiently to captivity, because it was Mary Stuart's will. Day by day he expected a pardon, a release, an acknowledgment, a communication, and day by day he was disappointed. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,' but this proverb applies rather to weak natures; in strong, it is apt to make the heart savage. Stung by what he conceived to be ingratitude, irritated by neglect, sore from conflicting feelings such as rend an ill-disciplined character with pangs to which mere physical suffering is comparative relief, those weeks spent in Edinburgh Castle produced an effect on Bothwell's disposition that after-years could never eradicate. Even 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh,' who remained in attendance on his master, and who was free to come and go at his pleasure, shook his head gravely and averred that 'confinement was just destruction baith to man an' beast! He would like fine to see the Warden ridin' the Marches again wi' the Liddesdale lads at his back.'

But though Dick thus expressed himself, and doubtless meant what he said, he was conscious in his heart that the banks of the Eske and the braes of Teviot-dale would never be the same to him again. The brawny borderer had a new interest in life now, strange to say, unconnected with hawk or hound, with morning chase

or midnight foray, with axe or lance or mighty stoups of ale.

Once in the week it was Mary Seton's custom to visit the town of Edinburgh on foot, to make purchases for her mistress and her comrades, of those odds-and-ends which ladies consume in such wonderful quantities. The wilful little damsel had taken a great fancy to the borderer, as you may see a child sometimes pleased with a huge Newfoundland dog. Such attachments are not remarkable for reciprocity. The biped, half pitiful, half amused, entertains a feeble liking for so faithful an attendant; the quadruped wishes no better lot than to serve its little idol slavishly all its life and die licking its hand. How the child cuffs it and teases it and makes the noble animal ridiculous, pulling its ears and tail!

'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' had but one day now in his week instead of seven. He observed, not without inward gratulation, that his attendance on these saints' days, so to speak, was by no means unwelcome; and Mary Seton, on her return to the palace, never omitted to inform the Queen that she had seen Earl Bothwell's henchman, neither did her mistress take her to task herself, nor suffer Mary Beton to do so, for these interviews.

So the strangely matched pair moved along the High-street, and the lady, who, in addition to his other good qualities, had discovered the borderer to be a capital listener, told him the court news for the edification of his chief, with considerable volubility.

'We're all in confusion now,' said she, one bright winter's day, as she tripped along the cleaner portion of

the pavement with a light basket in her hand, which sometimes as a great favour she permitted her Newfoundland to carry, while that faithful animal stamped contentedly alongside in the gutter. 'The palace is turned inside out. We have got the "new acquaintance" at Holyrood.'

Dick looked as if he didn't understand, and yet did not quite like the information. Something that would have been jealousy in a more presumptuous admirer, shot through his great frame. Had he been physically a retriever, he would have put his tail between his legs.

'I dinna like acquaintances,' said he, looking *down* at her bodily a foot or so; looking *up* at her metaphorically any number of yards. 'Give me friends, mistress Seton, auld friends, an' no too mony o' them.'

'You wouldn't like this acquaintance!' laughed the young lady merrily, whereat her companion looked on her admiringly as one who listens to sweet music. 'He's an acquaintance that would put *you* on your back readily; for as strong as you think yourself; he has overcome the Queen and the household and Mr. Randolph and Mary Beton, and all of them but *me*.'

'No,' replied the borderer. He did not the least understand what she meant, but admired her intensely nevertheless.

'It's the sickness,'* at last she condescended to explain between bursts of laughter at her companion's

* An epidemic that prevailed at the Court, answering to the indisposition which we now term *influenza*, and mentioned by Randolph in his letters to Cecil.

puzzled countenance. 'There are but two of the Queen's ladies fit for duty at all,—Mary Carmichael and me; and she is so occupied with your chief's kinsman, Mr. Maxwell, that she couldn't be more useless if she was ill in bed. The Court is as dull as ditch-water, and I shall have to walk up this weary hill to do everybody's business twice a week instead of once, that is the upshot of it.'

A ray of intense pleasure gleamed on her listener's face at this announcement; but it clouded over a minute afterwards, and he asked with undisguised anxiety, 'If there was no danger for herself?'

The girl could not but feel gratified at his obvious interest in her safety; but she laughed again, and answered merrily,

'Do you think nobody can be bold who is not six foot high? I fear sickness, I tell you, as little as you fear Lord Scrope, and hate it perhaps more; and yet you have the best of it, too. I had rather face death on an open moor than in closed bed-curtains. I wonder if anybody would miss me much,' she added, more to herself than him, for the grave chord had somehow been struck in her thoughtless character.

He did not answer, and when she looked at him, his face was turned away.

'Do you think they would?' she proceeded, with the pertinacity of a spoiled child. 'Stranger things have come to pass. You might be riding merrily in Liddesdale whilst Mary Seton was lying stark and cold under the Abbey stones.'

'It would be a dark day in Liddesdale,' was all the

answer he made ; but he would not let her see his face, and his voice sounded as it had never done before.

. A tinge of remorse, such as that which the urchin feels when he takes a bird's-nest, smote almost unconsciously at the girl's heart: yet was the sensation, though pathetic, by no means unpleasant.

She laughed and bantered him more than usual during their walk ; but on that day, and indeed every day afterwards till he returned to the Border, she suffered him to carry her basket ; and the honest retriever, proud of his degradation, followed at her heel, with ever increasing fidelity and devotion. The bird's-nest was taken now, and it is no use attempting to put such articles back again ; moreover it had been thoroughly harried, emptied clean of its treasures, and all the eggs were in that one basket.



CHAPTER XII.

‘ Oh ! is my basnet a widow’s curch,
Or my lance a wand of the willow tree,
Or my arm a lady’s lily hand.
That an English lord should lightly me ?’

UNUSUAL silence prevailed in the lofty hall of Hermitage, and the dinner hour, commonly one of mirth and festivity, arrived with a solemn gravity by no means welcome to the light-hearted borderers. It was in vain that large joints of beef and mutton steamed on the long tables, and ample baskets piled to the edge with coarse oaten bread stood side by side with deep measures of foaming ale below the salt, while a modest display of plate, in which one or two church ornaments were conspicuous, decked the upper end of the board. The preparations indeed smacked of good cheer, but the hilarity which promotes digestion was wanting.

The master-spirit, gloomy, morose, and pre-occupied, walked to and fro under the stag’s antlers, at the extremity of the hall, and no man dared to question or interrupt his meditations.

Bothwell was indeed chafing to the verge of madness. In vain he had submitted patiently to a mock imprison-

ment at the Queen's pleasure; in vain he had waited till days grew to weeks and weeks to months for some acknowledgment from Mary of the injustice she had done him—some expression of sorrow or sympathy for the loyal soldier and devoted vassal. No acquittal came, no reprieve, no message. Desperate and goaded he had escaped from his confinement at last, and fled to Hermitage, where he now found himself as autumn waned in the anomalous attitude of an attainted subject holding a royal fortress, and a Warden of the Marches, without the privilege of communicating with his Sovereign. It has been truly said that no position is so false as that which entails responsibility without conferring authority, and of this he found himself too keenly conscious. Neither was Bothwell's a nature to submit patiently to a slight. Hotheaded and irascible, with strong feelings and a sad want of foresight, he could act but he could not endure. At this period he had indeed sufficient reason to feel aggrieved, and he fretted like some wild animal in a cage. It was noon; the guard was being relieved in the outer court. Bustle reigned in the kitchen; two or three old hounds with wistful faces, licked their lips as they nosed the savoury preparations that emanated from that department; hawks screamed and flapped their wings on the perch; everything denoted the arrival of the most important hour in the twenty-four.

By twos and threes brawny men-at-arms lounged into the hall and took their places at the board. A year ago, shout and jest and schoolboy prank would have been rife at such a moment; the Earl's laugh would have been the loudest and his voice the gayest

amongst them all; now they watched him pacing silently to and fro, with looks askance. Taking their cue from their chief, the boisterous riders were gloomy as mutes.

Bothwell turned suddenly and summoned his henchman.

‘Is the holy man not ready yet?’ said he with something of irony in his tone. ‘Ho! bid the knaves bring in the food. Cowl or cassock, rochet and stole, or black Geneva gown, not one of them but comes to corn as kindly as the longest-legged borderer that ever lifted a spear. Bid them serve, Dick, in the devil’s name.’

‘Nay, James Hepburn,’ said a deep stern voice at the Earl’s elbow, ‘not in the name of the evil one, but in His from whom cometh all good. Bless the food,’ he added, stretching both hands over the board which was now spread, and shutting his eyes reverently while he prayed; ‘Bless those good things which are the product of thrift and honest industry, but may every morsel turn to gall on the lip and poison in the breast that is wrested by violence and bloodshed from the store of the widow and the fatherless!’

‘Amen!’ ejaculated Bothwell, without pretending to conceal the sneer on his lip, as he took his seat; whilst his retainers, glancing with a comical mixture of respect and astonishment at a man who dared to address their formidable chief in accents of reproach, seemed uncertain how to receive a blessing of such doubtful import on the Border; the obvious course was to fall to without further ceremony, and soon the clatter of knives and drinking horns drowned all qualms of conscience, if indeed such were experienced; ‘Dick-

o'-the-Cleugh' merely remarking as he filled his trencher, 'that if all the beef in the larder that was *lifted* behoved to turn to gall, there wou'd be no want o'mustard for a whiley in Liddesdale.'

Evidently putting a strong constraint on himself, the Earl proceeded to entertain his guest with marked distinction and courtesy. Indeed, after a time the stately bearing and obvious sincerity of the man could not fail to produce a favourable effect; and though Bothwell for political reasons was disposed to court his good opinion, he could not but confess to himself, that under that black robe and grave exterior, lurked a spirit equal in point of courage and far superior in energy, perseverance, and force of character, to his own.

Even the rude borderers felt the influence of his presence. Although the name of John Knox was ere this familiar in all men's mouths through the length and breadth of Scotland, these lawless soldiers, while professing for the most part the Reformed religion, which combined in their eyes the intrinsic advantages of freedom, liberality, and cheapness, were at heart woefully indifferent to its tenets or its obligations. They had thrown off with small compunction the shackles of the Roman Catholic Church; they were not quite so ready, however, to submit themselves to the discipline of that faith which had supplanted it. In all violent and fundamental changes of opinion, the teachers of a new doctrine have to contend with two serious difficulties: the ill-judged warmth of their more zealous disciples, and the convenient indifference of a large proportion of converts who cannot be brought to see the advantage

of dissent if it is to substitute one form of government for another.

Physically, the great Scottish Reformer appeared scarcely equal to the work he had engaged to perform. His spare frame was indeed sufficiently ascetic to command respect, and his dignified bearing, well set off by the close black gown, with its loose sleeves which he chose to wear, was not unworthy of the holy profession of which he was so zealous a member; but his stature was low and his bodily strength proportionate. Nevertheless, in his high grave brow, only partially covered by a close black skull-cap, there was rectitude, pitiless indeed of others' weakness, but equally stern and uncompromising towards its own. The bold features and pale colouring of a face more remarkable than comely, denoted energy with force of will; and though the mouth was somewhat large and coarse, its expression was firm and daring in the highest degree. His dark eyes, which it was his habit to fix intently on those with whom he conversed, were brilliantly piercing, and in the heat of argument or declamation shone and sparkled with an inward flame. A flowing beard descended to his girdle, somewhat softening the harshness of his features and imparting a patriarchal dignity to his whole person. There was but little appearance of versatility on his immoveable face, and yet John Knox, driven by his zeal into the political stream, had been forced to trim his bark more than once to suit the exigencies of the storm, and it may be that this very consciousness added to the stern defiance of his bearing.

Without attempting to be 'all things to all men,' the

Reformer never forgot for an instant the one end and aim of his unceasing efforts, the destruction of papacy in his native land; and if ever he did turn aside for an advantage or halt for a breathing-space, it was but to gather fresh energies for the great work, and devote himself more unreservedly to its accomplishment. If he was prejudiced, bigoted, and illiberal, he was at least an honest man thoroughly in earnest.

The latter quality invariably wins respect in the rudest as in the most civilized societies, and even Earl Bothwell's wild jackmen could not withhold an involuntary homage from one whose peaceful profession, while it did not affect his insensibility to physical danger, or his coolness under trying circumstances, was followed out with an energy and perseverance of which their own lawless pursuits afforded no example. The Reformer, too, for all his infirmities, could back a horse and fly a hawk with the best of them. His stirring life had given him habits of activity and daring, whilst the energy of action was not wanting, which is so useful an accessory to a keen intellect. Though he ate sparingly, the preacher's cup was filled and emptied with grave good-fellowship, and he did not disdain to mingle in such mirth as was restrained within the bounds of decorum. There was a spice of quaint humour in his conversation that insensibly excited the attention of the most careless listeners, and though he never so far forgot his sacred office as to descend into buffoonery, he was no contemner of a ludicrous illustration or a harmless jest.

The dinner, nevertheless, progressed wearily. The churchman's presence restrained that wild ribaldry which had been of late Bothwell's only attempt at

gaiety; and when the jackmen had eaten their fill and satisfied their thirst, a gloomy silence once more pervaded the old hall.

It was the practice at Hermitage to conclude every meal with the standing toast of 'Snaffle, spur, and spear;' but to-day cups were emptied less cordially than usual to the accustomed pledge, and a long grace from Mr. Knox immediately succeeding it, was received by the listeners with more respect than attention. It was a relief to all when the Earl, calling for a bason and ewer, dipped his hands, wiped his beard, and rose from table, summoning the Reformer to attend him for a stroll upon the rampart, and whispering a few words to 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' as he passed out of the hall.

That worthy received his master's commands with an appearance of intense gratification, which communicated itself, as if by electricity, to the majority of his comrades. Bustle and activity seemed all at once to pervade the castle, and the merriment hitherto stifled and repressed broke forth with renewed violence. The tramp of horses and the clank of steel smote gratefully on ears in which such sounds made the sweetest of music; and when the churchman crossed the court-yard in search of his host, he found it filled by some two score of well-mounted men-at-arms, drawn up in disciplined array, with 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' at their head.

The Earl was giving his final orders to this leader with considerable energy. He was in a towering passion, none the less unbridled that he was not going to command the expedition himself.

'Were he ten times Warden,' the Reformer heard him say, 'he should not drive horses, with impunity, from

my side the Mareh. Does my Lord Scrope think that James Hepburn has been superseded at Hermitage? or that I am a likely man to submit to the slight he has endeavoured to put upon me. Faith, not while this arm of mine can lay lance in the rest. If you come across the English Warden, Dick Rutherford, you shall cast James Hepburn's defiance in his teeth. Within twenty-one days, alone, or with his following, on foot or on horseback, with spear, sword, or axe, and not more than three English miles from the Border, I challenge him to meet me, if he be a man, and "God defend the right!" Have you pick'd the horses?' he added abruptly, and turning with a soldier's eye to scan the troop.

'I cast the twa four-year-aulds,' answered Dick, 'an' I waled the soar* and the three bays, forbye the white-footed yane, an' I'm ridin' Wanton Willie mysel'. Gin I track the drove to Peel-fell, will I follow them into Cumberland?'

'Follow them to hell!' answered Bothwell. 'I will have that grey gelding back if he is stabled in Carlisle. I'll have him from under Lord Scrope himself, if the Englishman never gets across a horse again. What! there is peace between the two countries, more's the pity, or I had been at his castle gate by this time with all Teviot-dale at my back; and so you may tell him if you can meet with him under steel.'

'They might ha' been ta'en by the Langholme lads,' interposed Dick, whose spirits were rising considerably

* Sorrel or chestnut—next to bay the favourite colour of the borderers.

with the prospect of a foray, but who looked upon the whole affair nevertheless as a matter of business combined with wholesome recreation. 'They lifted a score o' runts frae "daft Davie," in Lammas-time, an took the vara' coverlet aff his wife's bed. He saw it himsel' at Dumfries, pair fallow!'

'Nay, nay,' answered Bothwell, 'the Langholme riders do not come down by the score, with dags, and petroncls, and St. George's cross on their basnets. If it's not a Warden-raid, as indeed it can hardly be, it has been done by the Warden's orders, and he shall answer it to me as sure as I serve Queen Mary! At least, with all her pride, she shall know that Bothwell never suffered it to be lowered an inch,' he muttered between his teeth as he turned away.

'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' put the men in motion and himself at their head. As they emerged upon the open ground from the grey walls of the square old keep, the slanting beams of an autumn sun gilded the brown heather, and shed a soft lustre over the undulating moorland ere it flashed from the steel armour of the troop. The riders were in high spirits at the prospect of a change from their long period of inaction. The horses snorted and shook their bridles gaily. It was a party of pleasure and adventurous excitement to all concerned, and even now they were anticipating their plunder and jesting about their profits. Only one heart felt more softened than usual under its steel breast-plate. 'Dick-o'-the-Cleugh' acknowledged the influence of the mellow sunlight and the balmy breeze. Somehow the very earth and sky seemed to connect themselves with a pair of laughing eyes and a shower

of bright hair, with a fairy figure tripping up the High Street, a basket on its arm; or, as he had seen it first, shining like a vision of light in the dark passages of Holyrood, with a voice that used to thrill so sweetly once, that he never heard now but in his dreams. The henchman would have fought like a lion, and yet he felt tenderly disposed towards all living things. He would have met death more cheerfully than ever, yet he seemed only to have learned the value of life within the last few months; another contradiction, but is it not full of contradictions, that engrossing folly in which the true believer is as sure to suffer martyrdom as the false worshipper is to obtain his reward?

The Earl and his visitor watched the troop defiling round the base of a low acclivity that soon hid them from sight. As they disappeared, Bothwell turned away with a bitter curse. He scarcely felt as if he had a right to order an expedition on the Border in the name of his Sovereign, and again Mary's injustice and neglect rankled like a poisoned shaft in his breast. But the Earl was in no mood for balancing probabilities or counting cost. The horses that had been driven were his own, and he had reason to believe that Lord Scrope was not ignorant of the theft; this was sufficient to rouse his ire to the utmost, and he had dispatched a force to follow and retake them strong enough to preclude the possibility of failure. It was maddening though, to be compelled to stay within the four walls of Hermitage when his retainers were in the field; maddening, all the more that his present false position, as he argued, was owing to a Queen's injustice and a woman's ingratitude.

A few short turns upon the rampart, with the soft west wind fanning his brow, restored his composure, and addressing his companion, he professed his readiness to enter at once upon the business which had brought the latter to Hermitage.

The preacher pointed to the surrounding scenery, the waving tracts of moorland bathed in the lustre of an afternoon sun, the cattle feeding securely in the green nooks and pasturage which broke the uniformity of the undulating waste, the yellow patch of cultivation under the very shadow of the keep, and the clear autumnal heaven above all, pale and serene, and dappled here and there by flaky clouds edged with gold.

‘It is not *my* business,’ said the preacher, ‘nor is it *thine*, Lord Warden, that hath brought me here, but the will of Him who holdeth this glorious universe in the hollow of his hand. It is to do his work that I have ridden through these wastes from dawn till mid-day, and that I must depart again ere set of sun. I charge thee to aid me, heart and hand, in the service of my Master!’

It is the misfortune of earnest men that in this self-seeking world of ours, they seldom obtain the credit they deserve for sincerity and singleness of heart. Bothwell listened with outward respect, yet unworthy suspicions *would* not be kept down.

‘Now for some double-dyed intrigue,’ was his inmost thought, ‘some plot set on foot by impenetrable Moray, not satisfied with his new earldom, and turbulent Morton, with his own craft added to the recklessness of all his Douglas ancestors, and Maitland, the skilful penman, the subtle diplomatist, wise as the serpent and

plausible as the father of lies himself. They would fain make a cat's-paw of rude James Hepburn, for doubtless they want a bold heart and a ready hand to aid their schemes, and they send this godly man, half-fanatic, half-hypocrite, to feel if the tool be heated to the right temper. I wot they may burn their fingers, one and all of them, yet!' But he only answered abruptly,

'I believe you are the friend of my house. You will counsel nothing that can prejudice my honour, or my loyalty to the Queen.'

'My great-grandfather, my gude-sire, and my father, have served your family, James Hepburn, for three generations. Aye! served them when their banner was waving in the fore-front of the battle, and the arrows of the English archers were hailing against their harness like a storm from hell. Do you think their blood is not boiling in my veins because I wear a Geneva cassock for a steel breast-plate? Do you think if my forbears shrank not to ride through fire and water for the Hepburn, I would fear to encounter death in his defence, much less would tempt him to danger or disgrace. Nay, my lord Earl, though the commands of *my* Master are imperative, they will but lead to your aggrandizement in this world, and your salvation in the next.'

John Knox paused and turned a scrutinizing look on his companion's face.

The latter plucked a morsel of grass from the rampart and flung it on the breeze.

'Let us see how the wind blows,' he replied with a scornful laugh; 'fair or foul, ye can trim your sails to

it, all of ye, and I can ride through a storm with the best !'

'Nay,' exclaimed the Reformer, 'the labourer is worthy of his hire; know ye not that the great trial is approaching between the powers of darkness and the children of light? In France the sovereign and his ministers are determined to stifle the good cause with the strong hand, and even now the blood of saints and martyrs crieth aloud from the very stones in the streets of Paris. The scarlet woman who spreadeth her mantle over the Seven Hills, and waveth her white arms abroad to lure souls to perdition, seducing some with indulgences and driving others to despair with her curse,—is battling for her very existence and that of the reptiles she hath spawned, and who crawl around her feet. Here in Scotland, aye, at Holyrood itself, hath not an image been erected unto Baal? and is not the idolatry of the mass raised weekly by Mary Stuart, whom men call Queen of Scotland, and who is herself a daughter of perdition !'

'Hold!' exclaimed Bothwell, in a voice of thunder, and advancing a step towards the speaker as though about to hurl him from the rampart. He restrained himself however with an obvious effort, and proceeded in a calmer voice, 'It was not to malign his Queen that you sought an interview with the most devoted of her servants?'

Knox saw his zeal had carried him too far. The Reformer, like those whose persuasion he reprobated, was somewhat prone to allow that 'the end justified the means.' He retraced his steps therefore, as it were, and resumed more calmly,

'Her Majesty must be saved from the influence of

evil advisers. Why are her communications with the bloody Guises so frequent? Why is Popish Riccio all powerful at Holyrood? Why is Bothwell virtually banished, and well nigh attainted for a traitor? But because there is a schism in the camp of the faithful, and a house divided against itself shall not stand.'

'The Queen has indeed dealt me scant justice,' answered the Earl musingly. 'What would your employers have me do?'

'I speak for myself,' replied the other, 'or rather I speak the words that are borne in unto me by Him whose servant I am. What shall ye say of a family in which brother is at variance with brother? of an army in which troop falls away from troop, for some petty feud, when the enemy is drawn up over against them in battle array? The nobles of Scotland are gathering to the front for the defence of their souls' liberties, and the boldest spirit amongst them all keeps aloof here at Hermitage because of a foolish brawl with a weak enthusiast who bore him no real ill-will.'

'I will never return to Holyrood,' answered Bothwell, looking wistfully towards the north while he spoke, 'till the Queen sends for me herself and acknowledges her injustice. I will never stretch the hand of reconciliation to Arran till I have dealt him a buffet with a steel gauntlet and a Jedwood axe in its grasp.'

'Nay, nay,' expostulated the Reformer, 'shall the edifice that such as you might rear on the goodly foundation of religious zeal, with the barons of Scotland for your fellow-workmen, crumble away for want of one stone in its right place? Once reconciled with Arran, the House of Hamilton might easily be secured in your

interest. I can take upon myself to promise so much, or why am I here to-day? With Moray's good-will, Morton's friendship, the Duke's aid, and the favour of the godly throughout the kingdom, who so powerful at Court as the Earl of Bothwell? Would it not be well to teach the Queen (for her own welfare) the indispensable lesson that a woman can only rule through the influence of men; by the brain of the wise and the arm of the strong? Would it not be well that Mary Stuart should learn, once for all, that she must look to James Hepburn as her champion and her trust?"

The picture was painted in glowing colours and set in a vivid light. The temptation to such a nature as Bothwell's was indeed of the strongest. It thrilled through heart and brain, that imaginary victory which should place in his power the option of humbling her to the dust, by whom he felt so aggrieved, or better still of foregoing his revenge and enjoying the nobler yet more complete triumph of forgiveness to his Queen. Nevertheless, the feudal feeling of resentment for an aspersion was still strong within him.

'But he accused me of treason,' urged the Earl, lashing himself once more into anger, 'would have attainted me before the Council as a traitor to Queen Mary, as a rebel who meditated violence on her sacred person!'

'The dream of a madman!' answered Knox. 'You know well that the Earl's health has long been failing, that he is of those who are scourged and tormented in the body for the discipline of their souls. In his paroxysms of insanity he is as one possessed, but they leave him like the poor maniac from whom devils were

cast out, "clothed and in his right mind." Nay, he did but accuse you of that which he had himself meditated in his madness. The Earl of Arran did indeed entertain a wild project to carry off the person of Mary Stuart, and immure her in some stronghold at his pleasure. The scheme was that of a madman, and yet might it have been feasible nevertheless.'

Bothwell started and turned pale. He could not trust himself to speak. At that moment wild phantom shapes, that had vaguely haunted him for long, seemed suddenly to assume a distinct aspect of reality. Dropped by an unconscious hand, the seed now struck root, that was hereafter destined to bear such appalling fruit. The offspring of a chance word, a wild and maddening vision took possession of his brain. He looked around at the solid dimensions of his fortress; he counted the gallant hearts within its walls, for whom his will was law; he thought of his friends and following, his resources and his influence, his own daring and his father's brilliant crimes. One desperate cast for the great stake; one bold swoop for the shrinking quarry; a few shots, a thrust or two, a white form borne swiftly away at a gallop, and the sweet face that had been a dream to him all his life, might become a reality at last!

Why, even crazed Arran had been man enough to entertain such a scheme, whilst he, Bothwell, was eating his own heart here at Hermitage. Well, stranger things had come to pass. He must watch and bide his time; must be wary, vigilant: above all must be patient. It was a stirring season. For a bold man *nothing* was impossible.

He replied at last, but cautiously and with reserva-

tions. If he joined the Protestant party, agreeing to act with Moray, Morton, and the rest, it must be under certain conditions: if he consented to a reconciliation with Arran, it must be accompanied with sundry stipulations which should be communicated hereafter at greater length. Even Maitland could not have been more mysterious, and the Reformer found himself wondering at the rapidity of a transformation which had changed the wild reckless border noble into a cold and scheming diplomatist.

He had attained his object, however, and that was enough for him. With a firm persuasion that he was furthering the good work, he took his leave of the Earl well satisfied, resisting all hospitable importunities to remain, and even declining the offer of an escort to conduct him in safety through that lawless district.

‘My Master will care for me,’ said the preacher, as he prepared to leave the castle on horseback when the shades of night were closing in. ‘He who has sent me on my mission will provide for the safety of his servant!’ And so departed unarmed and alone.

Well might Morton hereafter pronounce over this dauntless nature its well-known epitaph, ‘There lies one that never feared the face of man.’



CHAPTER XIII.

'Bonny Kilmeny gaed up the glen,
But it was na to meet wi' Dunira's men,
Nor the rosy monk of the isle to see,
For Kilmeny was pure as maiden could be.'



ALTER MAXWELL was ere this domiciled at Holyrood. Attached to the Queen's household, and devoted to her person, Mary esteemed him not the least trustworthy of those servants in whom she placed implicit confidence. He had accompanied his Sovereign on those roving expeditions in which she took so much pleasure, when the beautiful Stuart, worthy to reign over a nation of warriors, would pass entire days in the saddle, traversing her dominions, and making acquaintance with her subjects; or flying her hawk and following her deer-hounds over the wild moorlands, and amongst the romantic passes of her new kingdom. He had attended her in her progress to Aberdeen, that ill-advised journey which, commencing with merriment and festivity, the huntsman's holloa and the cheering notes of the horn, ended in strife and bloodshed and the wild wailing of the coronach, cried by the widows of the Gordon over the flower of their clan.

Maxwell had done good service on that sad day when the waters of Corrichie ran crimson with the Highlandman's blood, and had turned with a brave man's pity from the sickening sight of Sir John Gordon's execution at Aberdeen, performed before the very eyes of the weeping Queen. Gallant, handsome John Gordon! the victim of a political intrigue, who walked to the block with the jaunty step of a bridegroom in holiday attire and waved his dying homage to his Sovereign, a brave soldier and a loyal gentleman to the last.

It is said that Mary fainted at the sight, and, indeed, she never attained the necessary hardness of heart to rule such a turbulent and distracted country as that in which it was her lot to reign.

On more than one occasion Maxwell had proved himself the possessor of a shrewd brain, a silent tongue, and a ready hand. His was that least courtier-like of characters, which yet perhaps thrives best at a court. When all around are selfish and intriguing, each feels well-disposed towards the frank single-hearted comrade who wishes but to serve his Sovereign loyally, and entertains cordial good-will towards his fellows. Monarchs, too, even the haughtiest and most exacting, are disposed to appreciate a blunt honesty that does not shrink from encountering the royal displeasure for the royal advantage, and doubtless find it refreshing from its contrast with the servility to which they are accustomed. It must be like the change from the sickly air of a hot-house to the fresh mountain-breeze. Besides, it is so easy to forgive even insolence in those who are wholly in their power; and there is a delicate flattery after all

to the lion's forbearance, in the man's temerity, who puts his head in the lion's mouth.

The Queen of Scotland, however, was one of those who, while they attach to themselves irresistibly all who come within their sphere, are from their own feelings disposed to think kindly of their immediate retainers, and to reward fidelity and affection as they deserve.

Maxwell found himself in high favour with Mary, and it is not strange that he should have been devoted heart and soul to her interests. He persuaded himself that he was loyal to his Sovereign for her own sake, and ignored with considerable determination that mistress Carmichael had any influence whatever over his sentiments.

That young lady's behaviour at this juncture was of a nature to make an admirer sufficiently uncomfortable. We remember to have heard that there *are* female dispositions on which the exercise of the affections has an irritating tendency, and to whom the dawning possibility of eventual thralldom is as agitating as it is inviting. These wild-birds, albeit they become when tamed the gentlest of domestic fowls, are sadly prone at first to beat their breasts against the cage, also to peck viciously at the caressing hand that would smooth their ruffled plumes. Whether it be that they entertain a feminine delight in any state of sentiment, argument, or fact involving a contradiction, or whether they indemnify themselves whilst they can for future docility, we profess ourselves incompetent to state; but, the axiom seems to be sufficiently established, that the process of taming is often uncomfortable and hazardous, the result not always to be depended upon when complete.

Mary Carmichael, in addition to her other qualifications, was a devoted Papist. Maxwell, it is needless to observe, a staunch Reformer. Religious feeling ran high at Holyrood. The Romish Church, a zealous advocate for proselytism at all times, has ever been most intolerant when losing ground; and perhaps no bigotry is so blind as a woman's adherence to a sinking faith.

Maxwell could not conscientiously look with approval on mistress Carmichael's rigid attendance at mass in the Chapel Royal. The maid-of-honour concealed neither her dislike nor her contempt for those who had abandoned the religion of their fathers and the ritual of their Sovereign. This alone was a fruitful source of irritation and ill-feeling between the lovers, if so they can be called; and when we add that the gentleman was of a haughty and reserved disposition, the soul of honesty and frankness, without the slightest experience in the ways of woman, and the lady as wilful, unjust, and self-tormenting, as those reasonable beings usually become when thoroughly in earnest, it is superfluous to dwell upon the feelings likely to exist between such a pair, continually brooding over imaginary wrongs, and never for a moment out of each other's minds.

One scene, amongst many, may afford a specimen of the terms on which they stood.

Maxwell was proceeding to the royal apartments with certain papers which had been submitted to Mr. Randolph's inspection ere they were returned to the Queen for signature—so anxious was Mary, at this period, to keep well with her Cousin of England. Elizabeth's Ambassador had taken rather a fancy, in his own selfish easy way, to his former travelling com-

panion, and though, of course, he would have sacrificed him without scruple, he probably liked him none the less that he could not fashion him into a tool.

As Maxwell traversed the long gallery, mistress Carmichael was proceeding in the same direction with a basket of winter roses gathered in the Abbey-garden, and could not forbear blushing as deep as the reddest of them when she encountered him. Of course she was angry with herself for doing so, and naturally visited the fault on him, arguing, plausibly enough, that if he had not been there it would not have happened; therefore she turned her head steadfastly away and marched on without speaking. Hurt and irritated, he drew aside to let her pass, thus meeting her, as it were, half way in her desire to avoid recognition. So far nothing could be simpler. If the lady did not wish to be delayed she had only to pass on without further stoppage. She did so accordingly, but by the merest accident, and the most provoking awkwardness, tilted her basket and dropped half her flowers on the floor. Of course he was compelled to assist her in picking them up; for these two were the only occupants of the gallery; so he knelt down and refilled the basket gravely without a word.

‘Thank you,’ said Mary Carmichael, with the slightest possible tremor in her voice. ‘How deftly you have done it, and how much beholden to you I am—and—and—thank you, Mr. Maxwell.’

Here was an opportunity that would have been seized by any other gallant about the Court to ask, at least, for one of the roses in reward; and perhaps even Maxwell, though somewhat impatient of such follies, would have

been less reserved with any other of the Maries than the one who now stood before him, still arranging her basket, and obviously in no immediate hurry to go away. He waited, however, for her to speak first. After a little hesitation she pointed to the papers he was carrying.

‘ Shall I take them for you to the Queen ? ’ said she, and her hand trembled as she extended it towards him.

He took the pretty hand in his own and she did not withdraw it.

‘ Mistress Carmichael, ’ said he, ‘ I am a plain man, and I hope an honest one. I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose any for lack of courage to ask an explanation. How have I offended you of late ? Tell me as frankly as I ask you, and I will take care not to transgress again. ’

Her bosom heaved and her colour went and came.

‘ Offended ? ’ she replied, ‘ and me ? oh ! no. What have I done to make you think so ? ’

He was still very grave and a shade paler than before, but his countenance was immovable and indeed stern. It was a peculiarity of Walter Maxwell that under strong excitement his exterior became unusually cold and composed.

‘ I have thought so for long, ’ he resumed. ‘ Perhaps it has distressed me more than you would think possible. I trust I have done my duty as thoroughly as if you and I had been friends, but I have felt that difficulties appeared greater and hardships less endurable than if our differences had not existed. The breach has widened day by day ; ere long you and I will have learned to hate each other. ’

‘Oh! no, no,’ she murmured, scarce above her breath, but she kept her head bent down and the tears were dropping fast among the winter-roses in her basket.

He had never let go her hand; he folded it in both his own and pressed it to his lips.

‘Mary Carmichael,’ said he, ‘since the day we first met in the forest of Chambord I have wished to be worthy of you, and you alone. I am no woman-worshipper, no smooth-tongued silken gallant, and yet I think there are few things I could not do to please you; nothing, save my honour, I would not sacrifice for your sake.’

A gleam of intense pride and pleasure shone for an instant in her eyes; the next, her face contracted as if with pain, and she looked up scared and wild, through her tears.

‘You must not say so—you must not say so,’ she exclaimed, drawing her hand away hurriedly, and with a frightened, half-distracted air. ‘Let me go now, let me go; I hear the others coming.’

‘Is that your answer?’ said he, very lowly and distinctly, but with a pale face and something in his voice that it was better not to trifle with.

She looked here and there, like some graceful wild animal caught in the toils. Footsteps were indeed approaching, and half the flowers were again scattered on the floor.

‘You must not say so,’ she repeated; but for an instant she placed her hand once more in his with a lightning glance of unspeakable tenderness; ‘at least not yet!’ she added, and sped hurriedly away.

When she was gone Walter Maxwell stooped down, picked up one of the roses, and hid it carefully within

his doublet. Then he proceeded to his business with a lighter heart and a brighter face than he had carried since he came to Holyrood.

We will follow the young lady to the apartment in which the Maries were accustomed to congregate when off duty, plying their needles with industrious rapidity, and lightening their labours, we may be sure, with the pleasures of conversation.

It was a pretty room high up in one of the turrets of the palace, overlooking the Abbey-garden, and was full of the little elegancies and comforts which women gather about them, or which seem to grow up around, in the most unlikely places, as a natural consequence of their presence. Quaint tapestry adorned its walls, less hideous than are usually those grotesque efforts of industry, and representing pastoral scenes of love-making and simplicity, not devoid of browsing sheep, limpid streams, and fat little cupids flying about in the air. Scarfs, fans, gloves, and needle-work were scattered over the room, and Mary Hamilton's rosary of fragrant wooden beads inlaid with gold, hung from the back of a carved oak chair, of which the cushions were triumphs of embroidery wrought by the maids-of-honour themselves. A portrait of the Queen in her well-known velvet head-dress and voluminous ruff smiled above the chimney-piece, and immediately under it was placed an elaborate crystal time-piece, of French workmanship, presented by her mistress to Mary Beton, and revered equally as a token of the royal good-will and a marvel of mechanical art. The last named lady glanced at it with the conscious pride of possession.

'It will be dark in less than an hour,' said she, fold-

ing away the corner of a large square piece of embroidery on which herself and two of her companions were engaged; 'we have done enough for one day, and these small stitches are very trying to the eyes. I expect the Queen's summons too, every minute, for one or other of us.'

'She is writing letters in her cabinet,' answered Mary Carmichael, who had her own reasons for knowing how large a packet had just gone in. 'I could see her beautiful head bending over her table as I came down the terrace-steps in the Abbey-garden when I brought you in these roses.'

'You haven't half filled the basket after all!' exclaimed Mary Seton, who was busy arranging the flowers about the room, 'and like your sex, my dear, you have taken care to gather plenty of thorns. If I wear a garland of them at the masque to-morrow as I intended, I shall be a veritable Scotch thistle, not to be touched with impunity; a fitting partner for that masterful border-thief, little Jock Elliott, who cocks his bonnet and sings "Wha dare meddle wi' me?"'

'You have become half a borderer yourself, I think, ever since Bothwell was banished the Court,' answered the other, not quite relishing this allusion to the half-filled basket of which the spoils were scattered in the gallery.

'Poor Bothwell!' answered Mary Seton with a sigh, 'now that is what I call a *man*! When he walks through the court in his armour, he looks like a tower amongst the other lords. There is not a taller or a more stalwart figure amongst all his riders, proper men

though they be, except perhaps that gigantic henchman of his ;' and again the damsel sighed, and looked grave for an instant, though she was laughing merrily again the next.

'Is he not coming back soon?' asked Mary Hamilton, waking up from one of her fits of abstraction and fixing her large mournful black eyes on Mary Seton's saucy blue ones.

'Who? which?' asked the latter mischievously.

'Why, d'Amville?' answered Mary Hamilton, absently, 'were you not talking of him? He has been more than a year away.'

'D'Amville!' exclaimed the other with her ringing laugh, 'I hope not! At least if he brings that mad poet in his train, to turn all our heads with rhymes and flattery. Nothing interests you but what comes from France! No, we were talking of Bothwell, stout Earl Bothwell, who is worth a dozen of him. I am sure the Queen thinks so.'

Mary Beton looked up reprovngly, but in vain; the flippant speaker was in her swing and not to be disappointed of her say.

'I'm sure we've all been dull enough at Court ever since Bothwell got into disgrace. And after all, I don't believe he bared steel till the others drew on him first. I *know* the Hamiltons out-numbered his people two to one, and nobody disputes that Arran is quite mad now, or that the Duke was always an old goose. I think it very hard that Bothwell should have been made the scape-goat, that I do! and I've always said he hadn't fair play from first to last.'

‘Hush!’ interposed Mary Beton gravely, ‘the matter was tried in Her Majesty’s own presence, before the Council.’

‘The Council were a parcel of intriguers!’ vociferated the little partisan, now getting positively vehement. ‘The Council wanted to get rid of him because he was the most loyal amongst them all, and they made the skirmish an excuse. Why, I’m sure Ruthven is ready enough with his dagger, and my own dear father cleared the High-street from end to end with his own good sword and half-a-dozen jackmen before I was born, and the King swore he was quite right. I’ve heard him say so a score of times. No! no! the Council had their own reasons, and I’ll never believe but that Englishman was at the bottom of it, though he pretended to be the Warden’s friend!’

‘If you mean Mr. Randolph,’ said Mary Beton, bridling within her ruff in high disdain, ‘you only expose your ignorance of state affairs. What could he have to do with it? or how could the turbulence of a wild border-noble affect the Queen of England’s confidential minister?’

‘Only that I am convinced his red-haired mistress is at the bottom of all the mischief that goes on here,’ answered the other, determined not to be put down. ‘I believe she hates our dear beautiful angel of a Queen, partly because she’s her cousin, and partly because she’s been married, and partly because there is nobody like her in this world. I won’t abuse Randolph, mistress Beton, because he admires you hugely, and that shows the man has good taste; but I may say

what I like of Elizabeth Tudor, who is no more *my* Queen than I am *hers*.

The elder damsel looked mollified, though she feebly deprecated the implied compliment.

‘These are dangerous topics,’ said she, gathering her draperies around her, and rising from her chair. ‘It is enough for us to occupy ourselves with our own office, and I cannot conceive why we have not yet heard Her Majesty’s summons.’

This lady was of a methodical disposition, and loved to perform her regular duties at their stated times without interruption.

‘Those endless letters!’ exclaimed Mary Seton; ‘and all about treaties and alliances and the most uninteresting subjects. I declare I wouldn’t change places with the Queen to have her beauty and her throne. She is harassed and wearied to death. Dear me! how I wish she would marry, and take some stout-hearted lord to share her troubles and anxieties with her once for all!’

‘I’m surprised at you!’ exclaimed Mary Beton, now completely shocked. ‘It is most indiscreet to talk on such matters, and scarce maidenly even to think of them. Is it that you might follow her example?’ she added in a tone of severe reproof.

‘I am not sure but what I should,’ sighed the other, and relapsed into silence which, strange to say, was not broken for the space of full five minutes.

Perhaps the last suggestion thrown out had awakened matter for reflection in the minds of each of the four Maries.

At the expiration of that period, however, Mary Beton remarked that it was getting very dark; and Mary Seton at the same moment proposed that James Geddes, the Queen's fool, should be summoned to make sport for them during the hour of idleness preceding supper.

'I will go for him,' said Mary Carmichael, and, wrapping a plaid round her head and shoulders, hurried out of the room.

James Geddes, who filled the honourable and somewhat lucrative office of royal fool or jester in the palace of Holyrood, was one of those half-witted unfortunates of whom so many may be met with even in the present day in Scotland, and who occupy the intermediate space between sanity and positive imbecility. They cannot be termed lunatics, for they are usually harmless and even amiable in disposition, showing kindly feelings towards animals, infants, and such helpless objects, and even school-children, if not tormented by the urchins beyond all endurance. They are not idiots, for although their perceptions may be warped, they are in vigorous possession of their faculties, and indulge indeed in a shrewd caustic humour of their own with which few rational beings can compete. Neither can they be called actually in their right mind. Perhaps the Scottish peasant best describes the mental state of such an one when he says in an explanatory tone, 'Ou! he's just a natural!'

James Geddes accordingly was 'just a natural,' and earned his wages, consisting of meat, and fee, a parti-coloured suit of clothes, and a cap and bells which he could not be persuaded to wear, by furnishing unlimited mirth to the royal household, and occasionally a jest

that diverted the grave lords in council, and reached the ears of the gentle Queen herself.

Such was the wiseacre, in search of whom Mary Carmichael sped down the winding stairs that led from the Maidens' Tower into the devious passages of the palace. Obviously the most likely place in which to find him would have been the buttery, for it is a kind compensation of nature, that weakness of brain should be accompanied by great power of the digestive organs, and James Geddes could eat as much at one meal as would last a philosopher for a week. The maid-of-honour, nevertheless, passed that well-stored apartment without stopping, and proceeded with a light step and a heaving bosom into the Abbey-garden, over which the dew was falling, and the shades of evening gathering fast.

Passing through the flower-beds she had despoiled in the afternoon, and which doubtless failed not to call up tender recollections, the young lady glided like a phantom into the shade of an adjoining orchard, through the branches of which an early star or two were already beginning to twinkle down. Here she halted, and, removing the shawl from her head, peered into the darkness, and listened attentively, though for a few minutes—

‘ The beating of her own heart
Was all the sound she heard.’

Now, by one of those coincidences which do occasionally happen in real life, especially where certain mysterious affinities combine to produce improbable results, Walter Maxwell was returning from Secretary Maitland's office to his own lodging at the same twilight

hour, and although it involved a considerable *détour*, had chosen to proceed through the Abbey-garden and along the corner of the orchard, from which in the day-time he could see the windows of the Queen's apartments and those of her ladies. Walter was no romantic enthusiast, to derive intense pleasure from a mere association of ideas, and yet he paused under the shadow of an old apple-tree, and gazing on the dark mass of building opposite, recalled with an intoxicating thrill his interview with his mistress in the gallery. We have, most of us, experienced certain moments in life when we are satisfied to enjoy present bliss, without taking into account the insufficiency of its cause, or the shortness of its duration. We know we are happier than we have any right to be, and we wilfully ignore the consciousness and refrain from asking ourselves the 'reason why.' Like pride, this state of self-gratulation usually 'goeth before a fall.'

Maxwell's quick ear could not fail to detect the light footstep of his ladye-love as she, too, entered the orchard, and he recognized her muffled as she was, and in the darkness, as we recognize intuitively those whom we have trusted with our happiness. He sprang forward to meet her. Undemonstrative and calm as was his character, he would have caught her to his heart and vowed never to part with her from that moment; but ere he had made one step in advance, a tall cloaked figure, which seemed to come out of the very stem of an adjoining tree, anticipated his movements, and Maxwell, scarce believing his eyes, saw the woman he loved caught in its arms and disappearing in the folds of that close and familiar embrace.

He had nerve, temper, and above all, self-command. Though the cold drops stood on his forehead and a deadly sickness crept about his heart, he had presence of mind to reflect on what he ought to do. In a dozen seconds he had argued the point, for and against, in his own mind, and had come to the conclusion that he was justified in undeceiving himself, at such a crisis, by the evidence of his senses. He remained under the shadow of the old tree and listened, with every organ painfully acute and every nerve strung to its utmost pitch.

‘My darling,’ said the stranger, smoothing back the hair from the face which looked fondly up into his own, ‘how late you are this evening. I should have gone without seeing you in five minutes more; but I knew you would not fail me, if you could help it, at our trysting-place.’

‘You might be sure of that,’ she answered, clinging to him with both hands clasped upon his shoulder. ‘Last week, and the week before, I came to the moment. I cannot bear to keep you waiting, or to think of you watching and hiding here like a thief. You that I am so proud of and so fond of; you on whose arm I would like to hang before the Queen and the whole Court, and I dare not even mention your name, except in my prayers. You are cold,’ she added, wrapping his cloak across his throat and chest with sedulous affection. ‘Cold and wet with dew already, and perhaps tired and hungry too, and I may not bring you into the palace and warm you and take care of you. Oh! what a life it is.’

He laughed cheerfully, though with caution.

‘Always the same,’ he said; ‘always unselfish and

considerate and thinking of me. Why, you little witch, do you never reflect on what a scolding you would get if you were caught running about like this, in the gloaming, to meet a cavalier under a tree? What would mistress Beton say forsooth? Strict mistress Beton! She would vow not a dove would be left in the dove-cote after a while if such doings were passed over. Do I look like a hawk to harry a bird's-nest, Mary? Am I such a terrible wild young gallant, my pretty one?'

She put her white hand over his mouth; Maxwell saw it in the starlight.

'Do not speak so loud,' she said, 'I am sure you are as incautious as a boy. Indeed I wish you *would* harry the nest, as you say, and carry me off with you, for I am tired of never seeing you, except by stealth; and then it makes me so anxious and so fretful not to know where you are or when we shall meet, for weeks and months together.'

'My dear,' he answered gravely, 'it is in the Queen's service and that of our religion. It must triumph at last, as sure as those stars are shining above our heads. You and I have vowed to devote our lives, if need be, to the good cause. If worst should come to worst, we shall not be separated for long. There are no partings up there, Mary.'

He pressed her tenderly to his side and pointed to the sky, in which star after star was now glimmering forth.

She drew her hand across her eyes and kissed him fervently once more.

'I shall be missed,' she said; 'I must stay no longer.'

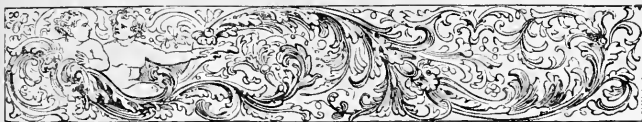
It is *very* hard not to see you again for such a time! Well, well, duty before all. And now, have you the packet from the Cardinal? What say the Guises to the last communication?’

‘They dare not even write,’ he answered. ‘Though I acted my part well, and looked such a masterful beggar, that even you, Mary, would have flung me an alms, they searched me when I landed at the port of Leith, scrip, wallet and all, nay, they broke my staff across, lest it should be hollow and filled with papers—I would I might have done it myself over the knave’s pate that could be so wary. No, the despatches must travel by word of mouth, and that is a better trick than even Randolph has learned yet, with all his cunning. Listen, Mary; they trust you, my pretty one, because you belong to me,—this is for the Queen’s private ear alone.’

Maxwell was a man of honour. He would stay to hear no more. It was enough that his dearest hopes had withered in a breath; that the edifice he had been building insensibly for so long, decking it with all his fancies and furnishing it, so to speak, with the most precious gifts of his affections and the warmest feelings of his heart, had crumbled into dust at a moment’s notice; he would not for that intrude upon another’s secrets; and although the delay of a few moments might have placed him in possession of matters that would have ensured his own aggrandizement, and enabled him to take a fearful revenge on the two by whom he felt so cruelly injured, yet he stole noiselessly away, placing his hands upon his ears, that he might not, inadvertently, hear another word of their communications.

Where is the man who can consistently shape his conduct upon a train of reasoning independent of his feelings, at least where those feelings are vitally concerned? It never occurred to him that he had no right to listen at all. The question was one of life and death to him, and he felt justified in arriving by any means at a certainty. Such is human nature in the best of us. Principle is principle, and honour is honour, only so long as circumstances are not too overwhelming or necessity too urgent. Conscience is the only guide who never yet lost his way.

We will not follow Walter Maxwell as he left the Abbey-garden for the solitude of his own chamber, never utterly dreary and forlorn till to-night. He had a brave stout heart, that could strive against any odds, and scorned to flinch from any amount of pain. Perhaps these suffer most in proportion to their strength.



CHAPTER XIV.

‘And some said this, and some said that,
And our bonnie Queen, she laughed loud and free,
But down on his knees, the poor fool sat,
Says, “Never a fool is there here but three!”’

AFTER taking a tender farewell of the cloaked stranger, more touching and affectionate, if possible, than her greeting, Mary Carmichael fled back to the palace like a lapping. There was no time to lose in securing James Geddes, if she would not have the length of her absence remarked, and she found him as she expected drinking a warm posset in the buttery. Like the rest of his class, the fool could at times be sufficiently self-willed and captious, rating his own society at no trifling value, more especially if he saw that it was sought after, and it required no small amount of management to wheedle him into merriment if not so disposed. On the present occasion he refused point-blank to stir from the chimney-corner, and it was only by dint of much coaxing, and the promised bribe of a box of French comfits, that Mary Carmichael prevailed on him to accompany her, and bore him off in triumph to the

turret-chamber, there to make sport for the Queen's maids-of-honour.

His entrance was greeted by acclamations, which he received with complete indifference; he brightened up, however, when the comfits were produced, and sat down to munch them with an expression of the most perfect satisfaction and vacuity.

He was a stout middle-sized man, with a long heavy face, a large mouth, and hanging under-jaw. When he lolled his tongue out, and half shut his meaningless grey eyes, he looked a being devoid of the slightest spark of intellect; at such times, nevertheless, he was most apt to produce those simple witticisms, which served to amuse the Court.

Not a word was to be got from him till he had finished the comfits. At length the last and largest disappeared down that capacious maw, then he yawned, stretched himself, and condescended to observe,

'He would have to bid the ladies farewell, as to-morrow he should take his leave of Holyrood.'

'What shall we do without you?' exclaimed Mary Seton, who took James Geddes under her special protection, and vowed, in her pert way, that he was infinitely more sane than half the Queen's advisers. 'We cannot let you go,—you are the only amusement we have!'

'There'll be no lack of fules the morn,' answered James with a look of comical disgust; "'deed they may call it Folly-rood now, with gude cause. Have ye no heard tell of the braw doings in the Queen's Park? Troth, ye'll be able to wale your joes the morn! Every lass her lad! And they riding mother-naked every man

o' them. Na, na, they're no wantin' fules at Court i' the noo, an' I'll just tak' my foot in my hand, an' turn wiselike mysel'.'

'Why the masque will only be six against six as usual,' answered Mary Beton, characteristically disposed to take a matter-of-fact view of the proceedings, 'six Savages and six Amazons. I have seen the dresses, and very complete they are. What is there in that to displease you, James? I thought you dearly loved a festival or a frolic.'

'I'll no gang till I've had my denner,' answered James, 'but I'll no bide at Holyrood, once the trade is overstocked as it is like to be. I'll just gang my ways to the Border an' take up with stout Earl Bothwell and muckle Dick. He'll like fine to get word o' mistress Seton. Troth, if they measure fules by the foot ye've gotten a grand yane, my bonny doo, to your share, for ye've clean bewitched Dick.'

That young lady laughed and blushed, then frowned and looked cross, lastly peeped into the box of comfits for something to stop James's mouth withal. The latter put on his densest look and proceeded,

'Aye, the time's no what it was. I mind when me and Jenny Colquhoun was the only fules in Holyrood, forbye the French lassie that was no worth speaking of, and Robin Hamilton, the porter. Set him up! to shut the wicket in my very face last St. Andrew's day and swear he would break my scone across, if it wasna as toom as a borderer's bonnet. Awbody kens he's a Hamilton, an' the Hamiltons have aye mair hide than horns. Nae offence to the bonny ledly here, that's no mindin' the like o' me. Aweel, there's mair fules than

three at Holyrood i' the noo, an' it's time for James Geddes to be packing, when he's the only wiselike body about the place.'

'Then you think we are all losing our wits,' remarked Mary Carmichael, as she made up the wood-fire, lit the silver lamp that stood on the table, and set the room in order, according to her wont.

'Ye'll no find yours in the Abbey-garden, I'm thinkin',' replied James, whereat the questioner looked extremely angry and confused. 'I mind a bonny sang that plays—

"I'll wager, I'll wager, I'll wager wi' you,
Five hundred merks and ten."

I'll no tell ye the wager, mistress Carmichael; I'm only a fule ye ken; but "I'll wager, I'll wager, I'll wager wi' you," that ye dinna gang oot like a ghaist in the gloamin' just to pu' an apple frae a tree. There's a canny lad wad like ill to jalouse ye kept tryst wi' anither; that's just one mair to the count. I doubt I maun be flittin' frae Holyrood, or we a' gang daft thegither.'

'What does he mean?' exclaimed Mary Beton, all the duenna aroused within her as she marked the fool's cunning looks, and her comrade's obvious discomfiture.

'Hooly an' fairly, mistress Beton!' exclaimed Geddes, with whom the Queen's principal lady was no great favourite. 'Keep your ain breath to cool your ain brose. Will you grudge the lasses their bit ploy, an' keep back all the joes to yersel?

"She wadna hae a Lowland laird,
Nor be an English lady."

They'll no threep that on you, mistress Beton. Na' na, ye're a true Scotswoman, an' it's just a spoilin' o' the Egyptians, as godly John Knox wad call it. Troth, ye've made a fule o' a wiser body than yoursel', I'm thinkin'. I'll no grudge maister Randolph the cap an' bells, but he'll get the fee an' bountith a' gate the like o' him gangs, I ken fine. Aweel! ten fingers an' ten taes, I canna number the fules at Holyrood, for I'm no gude at the countin,' and I canna tell mair than a score; but I'll gang my ways to the Border the morn, for the trade is just over-stockit.'

'You give your tongue too much liberty,' said Mary Beton, who was considerably displeas'd at James Geddes's indiscreet allusions, and not dispos'd to conceal her disapproval. 'You presume on the Queen's good nature. Have a care; if I mention your conduct to the master of the household, you will be taken to the porter's lodge to taste of Robin Hamilton's discipline once again!'

The fool's face grew livid, and an ugly gleam shot from his heavy eye. There was evidently some rancour brooding in his heart against the tall porter, who, it may be, in virtue of his office, had been order'd ere now to inflict corporal punishment on the jester. He fell to cursing the Hamiltons with the unmeaning malevolence of insanity. From the proud Duke and his unfortunate son, whose state of mind should indeed have obtain'd immunity from a fellow-sufferer, to the stalwart gate-keeper, he call'd down upon all who own'd the name every evil that madness could imagine, or hatred suggest, and then stopping suddenly in his curses, he mov'd

awkwardly across the room to where Mary Hamilton, buried in thought, sat somewhat apart from the rest, and seizing the hem of her garment, began mouthing and kissing it and wetting it with his tears, in a reaction of feeling which, sustained by one so imbecile, it was pitiful to behold.

As they are given to unaccountable and deep-rooted aversions, to gratify which they have been known to display incredible sagacity and cunning, so these unfortunates are capable of strong attachments, cherished with a morbid vehemence peculiar to their malady. A madman's affection and a madman's hatred are alike to be avoided, since the former is as inconvenient as the latter is dangerous.

James Geddes entertained a devotion for Mary Hamilton which amounted to idolatry, and was never so well-satisfied with himself, or so nearly rational, as when employed in some trifling commission, for the beautiful maid-of-honour. Also he watched her as you may see a dumb animal watch every look of its owner, and was especially jealous and irritated if he fancied she bestowed too much notice or favour on any one else.

'What is he driving at?' exclaimed Mary Seton, observing that the fool, although with an expression of deep contrition, was now indulging in a series of mysterious winks and signs. 'Ask him, Mary Hamilton! He seems to have some secret understanding with you. Ask him, for pity's sake, my dear, he'll have a fit if he goes on like that.'

But her curiosity was not destined to be satisfied, for at this juncture a page entered the apartment with a summons for mistress Hamilton to attend the Queen;

and that lady departed accordingly, leaving her half-witted adorer in a state of woeful penitence and discomfiture. Crouching among the embers in the hearth, he hid his face in his hands, rocking himself to and fro, and 'crooning' in a sing-song voice a succession of broken unintelligible sentences. From these fits of dejection the ladies knew it was impossible to arouse him.

The Queen was seated at a massive oaken writing-table, on which she was heaping together a quantity of letters and papers when Mary Hamilton entered. A single lamp shed its light upon her fair brow, which seemed to-night heavy with an unusual load of care. Her features wore the languor of mental fatigue, and even her attitude denoted the listlessness of one who is wearied by too much thought and study. She had been writing to her Cousin of England, and if it was a difficult matter to be well with Elizabeth at best, how much more so now when her suspicions were excited and her jealousy kept continually awake by the question of succession. The Maiden Queen was not without that strange weakness of humanity, which so disquiets itself as to what shall become of its earthly possessions when it is gone.—An anxiety no stronger in the monarch who has a kingdom to bequeath than in the old woman who has hoarded her forty shillings in a stocking. Will it affect them so much in that spirit-world, even if they learn it, to know that the dynasty has been changed, or the funded property squandered, or the entail cut off?

There is many a man now living who would rather lose an arm or a leg than think that the old avenue will be cut down when he is gone to a land where the

trees of life and knowledge flourish in perennial verdure, and all the while young Graceless his heir, is scanning their girth and substance, with a wistful consciousness that the Jews *must* be paid at last. Horace has told us something about those 'dreaded cypresses' which we would fain ignore. They will wave over our dwelling when the oaks in the park have been disposed of at so much per foot and the family tree itself is withered and forgotten. Do you think it matters much to Smith deceased, the tenth of his illustrious line, that Brown should have succeeded to his place and property, or that B. should cede in turn to Jones and Robinson? 'A plague o' both your houses!' All this, however, has nothing to do with the House of Tudor.

Independent of the natural aversion entertained by every right-minded woman for another of her own sex who is sought after by a multitude of suitors, Elizabeth had a variety of excellent reasons for disliking the Queen of Scots. The latter was considerably her junior, unquestionably more beautiful and accomplished, gifted with that mysterious fascination which makes women angry and men foolish, and in addition to these offences, was indubitably the next heir to the English Crown. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the Maiden Queen should have delighted in heaping difficulties across the path of her widowed cousin, and this was done the more effectually by keeping well with her to all outward appearance, and interchanging a constant succession of rings, precious stones, letters of courtesy, and the like insidious compliments.

Nor was Mary deceived by these artifices. It is probable that she clearly perceived the hollow nature of

her kinswoman's friendship, and returned it in kind so far as her open generous character would permit. But it was not in this Queen's nature to cherish lasting feelings of ill-will, and she had also doubtless the good sense to see that in her precarious position Elizabeth's favour was essential to her security and support. So she corresponded with her regularly in a vein of cordial affection, amounting even to familiarity, and it is no wonder that Mary rose from the composition of one of these letters with an air of unusual exhaustion on her lovely face.

'Help me to seal these packets, my dear,' said she, to the maid-of-honour as the latter approached her table, 'my fingers are perfectly stiff with holding a pen. No wonder my forefathers esteemed the art of writing a disgrace, and swore that the grasp of a noble hand should never close on anything lighter than a lance. I often wish I was a man to wear steel on my breast and at my side!' While she spoke, she stretched her beautiful fingers, which did indeed look far too delicate to wield any weapon heavier than a needle, and pushing the state seal across to her maid-of-honour, threw herself back in her chair as if thoroughly tired with her day's work.

Mary Hamilton occupied herself at once about her task, affixing the seal of Scotland with its lion rampant and its crown-royal to document after document, in a graceful womanly way that attracted the Queen's notice, and caused her to regard her favourite maid-of-honour with more attention than common.

The latter was always pale, and unusually quiet in her demeanour, but of late she had become paler than

ever, and her customary repose of manner had subsided into dejection. Without obvious ailment, she looked listless and out of spirits, languid in her movements, and far too grave for one so young.

Herself wearied and harassed, it struck the Queen particularly to-night, and she could not forbear noticing it.

‘You are ill, Mary,’ said she, ‘and worse than that, you are unhappy. What is it? there is something the matter!’

‘Nothing, Madam,’ answered the other, looking up with a transparent effort at cheerfulness. ‘How can I be unhappy when I am at Holyrood, and near your Majesty?’

She did not say it in the complacent tone of a courtier, but with a warmth and sincerity that could not have been assumed, her large dark eyes moistening and shining in the lamp-light; she thought she loved the Queen better than anything on earth, and so she did—save one.

‘I know you are fond of me, child,’ answered the Queen affectionately; ‘that does not make me the less anxious about you. I think of all my Maries you are the most dependent upon me. Have a care, my dear! there seems to be a fatality about Mary Stuart. Those who love me best seem ever to be the most unfortunate.’

She spoke mournfully, and in an abstracted tone. Was she thinking of her dead bridegroom who had worshipped her? of the mother who had doated on her? of the loyal and brave and the true already proscribed, banished, or disgraced? was it memory, or foreboding,

the sorrows of the past, or fears for the future, that thus so often cast a gloom over her spirit, and damped her royal courage at her need?

‘Do you think that would not make me love you ten times more?’ exclaimed the other with a flash from her glorious eyes that lightened up her whole face. ‘Can there be love without sacrifice, Madam? Nay,’ she added in a sadder voice, ‘can there even be love without suffering?’

‘You are very young to say so,’ answered the Queen, ‘two years younger than I am, and I remember how I used to think that sorrow was the especial heritage of the old. I have learnt otherwise now; but you, Mary Hamilton, you whom I have always watched and sheltered as a bird shelters its nestling under its wing, what can *you* know of suffering?’

The maid-of-honour looked wistfully at her mistress while she replied.

‘I never can know real sorrow, Madam,’ she said, ‘nor real suffering, because I have a refuge more secure than even a queen’s favours, and to that refuge I betake me whenever grief becomes too heavy to endure. Ah! Madam, they may take everything from us here, but they cannot rob us of that; this world is sometimes very dark and sad, but the light is always shining just the same, far away at home.’

The Queen looked at her with concern and surprise; what could it be, this engrossing sorrow which cast its shadow over a young life that ought to have shone so hopeful and so bright? The girl must be very unhappy, she argued, to be so devout. Alas! that it

should be so; that religion, instead of the pride of the strong, should so often prove but the refuge for the weak. And yet it is but one more instance of that mercy which knows no limit. The happy and the pious too, enjoy indeed a favoured lot, but human nature is so warped, that in the majority continuous prosperity produces hardness of heart, and for these it 'is good to be in trouble.' When they have lost all (it matters not what constitutes it, fame, wealth, or affection) they run for consolation, like a child in distress to a parent, where it never is denied; and which of us is there who does not know how unspeakably precious is the balm of kindness to a bruised and empty heart? A few there are on whom adversity has a contrary effect. Rebellious spirits, not without force of character and capacities for happiness, who become forward and desperate under the rod. Woe be to them! what shall bring such as these back to the fold? Human forbearance would say 'let them go in their wilfulness to destruction!' but it is well for us that it is not with human forbearance we have to do.

The Queen of Scots herself was of a gay and hopeful disposition, one which perhaps it required many reverses to steady and sober down. Plenty of them she sustained ere all was done! In the mean time her kind heart was moved to think that her maid-of-honour should have some secret grief she herself could not alleviate.

'Tell me, dear,' said she, 'what it is that thus weighs upon your spirits and takes the colour out of your cheek. I have seen it for long; confide in me, not as

your Queen, Mary Hamilton, but as your mother or your elder sister. I too am a woman, a failing, weak-hearted woman like the rest. I can only imagine one cause for such deep-rooted sorrow, and yet I cannot think my beautiful Hamilton should be in such a plight. Is it,' and the Queen too looked confused while she asked the question, 'is it some unfortunate—some unrequited attachment?'

The maid-of-honour blushed to her very temples, and the lustrous eyes that had been gazing fondly into the Queen's face were lowered for an instant, but she raised them with an effort, and drawing herself up, with her colour deepening every moment, answered proudly,

'Nay, Madam; we Hamiltons have your own princely blood in our veins, and do not give our love unasked or unreturned. The Maries, too, follow their Queen's example, and would deem it worse than unmaidenly to entertain a secret or unacknowledged preference. We hold our heads high, you know, Madam, like our mistress.'

The Queen looked as if she did not quite agree with her, and was about to answer, when a soft strain of music rose from the Abbey-garden, and arrested the attention of each lady as if by a charm. The casement was thrown open, and the night wind stole in bearing with it the melodious tones of a lute struck by no unpractised hand, and the notes of a rich voice that each seemed to recognise simultaneously with mingled embarrassment and delight.

There was then a proverb current in Scotland, which

the poet seemed to have embodied in the verses he now poured forth on a flood of harmony—

- ‘The brightest gems in heaven that glow,
 Shine out from the midmost sky;
 The whitest pearls of the sea below
 In its darkest caverns lie.
 He must stretch afar, who would reach a star,
 Dive deep for the pearl, I trow:
 And the fairest rose that in Scotland blows
 Hangs high on the topmost bough.
- ‘The stream of the strath runs broad and strong,
 But sweeter the mountain rill;
 And those who would drink with the fairy throng
 Must climb to the crest of the hill.
 For the moonlit ring of the Elfin-king
 Is danced on the steepest knowe,
 And the bonniest rose that in Scotland blows
 Hangs high on the topmost bough.
- ‘The violet peeps from its sheltering brake,
 The lily lies low on the lea,
 While the bloom is on ye may touch and take,
 For the humble are frank and free;
 But the garden’s pride wears a thorn at her side,
 It has pricked to the bone ere now,
 And the noblest rose that in Scotland blows
 Hangs high on the topmost bough.
- ‘’Twere a glorious gain to have bartered all
 For the bonniest branch in the bower,
 And a man might well be content to fall
 In a leap for its queenliest flower!
 To win her, indeed, were too princely a meed,
 To serve her is guerdon enow,
 And the loveliest rose that in Scotland blows
 Hangs high on the topmost bough.’

Mary Stuart and Mary Hamilton looked at each other in amazement. The former laughed sweetly.

‘It is our minstrel come back again,’ said she, ‘and as welcome as he is unexpected. He has not forgotten the art in his absence from the inspiration.’

While she spoke she shifted the lamp from the writing-table to the window-shelf, where its flame was sheltered from the breeze by the unopened half of the casement.

The maid-of-honour answered nothing; but the Queen could not help remarking she became very restless and pre-occupied, accepting her dismissal for the night in silence, but with more alacrity than usual.

Chastelâr in the garden saw the light shifted from its place in the Queen’s apartment, and interpreted it into an encouragement of his own wild hopes. His heart leapt, his brain glowed, his blood ran fire. Long absence, rational considerations, obvious impossibility, had not quenched his folly. He had left d’Amville, had wandered to and fro, had returned to Scotland with no definite object but to look on the face that haunted him night and day. He was love-mad; it mattered not what became of him: to live or die he cared not; but it must be at the Queen of Scotland’s feet.

And Mary Hamilton, in her solitary chamber, fell on her knees and thanked heaven that she should see him once again.



CHAPTER XV.

‘ Four-and-twenty nobles sit in the king’s ha’ ;
Bonnie Glenlogie is the flower amang them a’ ;
In cam’ Lady Jean, skipping on the floor,
And she has chosen Glenlogie ‘mang a’ that was there.

‘ Glenlogie ! Glenlogie ! an’ you will prove kind,
My love is laid on you ; I’m telling you my mind :
He turned about lightly, as the Gordons does a’—
I thank ye, Lady Jean, my love’s promised awa’.’



THOUGH it was mid-winter the sun shone brightly as in June. The bold outline of Arthur’s Seat cut against a cloudless sky, and a light air from the opposite coast of Fife, cleared the Firth of its accustomed vapours, and brought out in fair relief the smiling bays and noble headlands of its romantic shores. Far to the eastward, where a white sail glistened in the sun, loomed the bluff island of the Bass, poised, as it seemed, in mid-air by the magician’s art, so imperceptibly were sea and sky blended together in the distant horizon ; while beyond it, North-Berwick Law reared its cone above the undulating line of coast that stretched away to the southward till it faded from the sight. To the west, the wooded shores, the jutting promontories, and

the sparkling water, combined to form a scene such as men imagine in their dreams, shut in by the dark glades of Hopetoun and Dalmeny; dim, rich, and beautiful, like a glimpse of fairy-land. With the castle of her strength crowning her comely brow, the old town sunned her terraced streets and high fantastic buildings in the warmth of noon, looking down, as it were, with proud protection on the smooth lawns and dainty gardens that adorned the palace of her kings. Like some rare jewel, carved, rich, and massive, resting on a velvet cushion, lay the square edifice of Holyrood, on its green and level site. Though the stately towers and delicate pinnacles of the Abbey were in deep shadow, the sun shone gaily on the Queen's Park beyond, crowded as it was with masses of spectators and glittering with the brightest and fairest of the Scottish nobility.

Barriers had been placed in this well selected spot, lists for the exercises of chivalry carefully laid out, and galleries erected for the fairer portion of the assembly, whose applause was destined to encourage the competitors and reward the successful.

The Queen and her maidens occupied the most prominent of these stages; but Mary Stuart, true to the warlike predilections of her blood, descended from her position of advantage and, followed by her train, proceeded in person to examine the arrangements for the pastimes, and the dress and horses of those engaged.

Loud acclamations greeted her as she passed through the crowd. Though habited in mourning, as was her custom, that bewitching face did not fail to produce its usual effect even on the strictest of the Reformers. Here and there, indeed, some severer dame might shake

her head and purse up her lips in obvious disapproval of her Sovereign, but such demonstrations were confined to the female sex, and only to the oldest and ugliest of *them*.

The tournament of the Middle Ages had ere this period fallen into disuse. Gunpowder had already taught the warrior that his cumbersome array of mail and plate was no secure defence, and although he had not yet discarded corslet and head-piece, he was already beginning to learn the lesson of modern warfare—that sagacity is as important a gift as courage, and agility a more effective quality than strength. Perhaps also the untoward accident that, within a few years, had deprived France of her monarch, served to bring the tournament into disrepute; and the Scotch who, besides their tendency to imitate French manners, were then as now, somewhat of utilitarians, need not have been long in arriving at the conclusion that such conflicts were a waste of strength, courage, and mettle, both in man and horse.

Riding at the ring, however, an exercise requiring perfect horsemanship and great dexterity in the use of the lance, long remained a favourite amusement amongst the young Scotch lords. It was no easy task to carry off, on the point of a spear, a ring scarce two inches in diameter, suspended from a slackened cord, whilst moving at a gallop; and the cavalier whose hand, eye, and seat were alike perfect enough to accomplish this feat, would have been a formidable antagonist in the crash of a real encounter—man to man and horse to horse, armed *cap-à-pie* in steel.

On the present occasion the amusement partook

somewhat of the character of a masque. The two Lords Stuart, in defiance of mistress Alison Craig's prophecy, had not found themselves so tamed and spirit-broken by marriage as to give up their favourite occupations, and had been instrumental in setting on foot the pageant which had now collected so motley a concourse in the Queen's Park. Six gallants disguised as amazons, had resolved to hold the lists against other six disguised as savages, the victory to be decided by success in carrying off the ring. The Queen herself had given the prize to be contended for—a gold heart of exquisite workmanship, and a purse filled with broad pieces. To add to the interest, a dozen of ladies chosen by lot, amongst whom were the Queen and the Maries, had been entreated to select each one a champion, and it was partly for this purpose that the train of female beauty, with Mary Stuart at its head, now wound in and out amongst the barriers which enclosed the lists, together with the domestics and horses of those who were about to ride.

As she approached one of the savages, who was already in the saddle and poising his lance in his hand, the Queen started and turned pale in obvious distress. She would have passed him without notice, but the rider, whose wandering eye and excited gestures denoted that he ought not to be at large, reined his horse across Her Majesty so as to oppose her progress, and casting his lance at her feet, demanded to be chosen her champion and her true knight.

The Queen drew herself up and looked really angry. 'This is too much!' said she. 'How far has the

Earl of Arran's loyalty and good conduct been so pre-eminent that he can dare to claim this proud distinction? By the laws of chivalry every lady has the right to her own choice, and here is mine.'

The Queen pointed to the nearest horseman as she spoke. He was richly dressed as an amazon, and his glowing complexion and regular features would have done no discredit even to one of those female warriors. She had selected him at random as a proper rebuke to Arran's insane presumption, but like many another act of her life it was as untoward as it was hasty. Chastelâr, for it was none other, sprang from his horse and knelt in acknowledgment at the Queen's feet, laying his lance down at the same time before her in an attitude expressive of humility and adoration.

'To the death!' exclaimed the poet, literally kissing the hem of the Queen's garment ere he sprang once more into the saddle and forced his horse in a series of managed bounds to the farther extremity of the enclosure.

One of the maids-of-honour looked disappointed and distressed. Mary Hamilton would fain have selected the Frenchman for her champion during the day, a distinction which would probably make him her partner also in the ball at night.

As the ladies passed on, the Queen's half-brothers, both habited as amazons, approached Her Majesty, dragging between them with shouts and laughter, a lad of some sixteen summers, whose fair, beardless face was indeed blushing like a girl's.

'Choose him, Madam!' exclaimed the merry lords, in a breath, while the younger, with a comical affectation

of womanly reserve, spread his gilded buckler before the lad's crimson cheeks. 'George Douglas has never lifted spear before; he is indeed a redoubtable champion for a Queen.'

Tears of shame and vexation started to the boy's eyes, yet he looked pleadingly at his Sovereign, as if with a confused hope that the great ambition of his life might be realized.

Mary was always gentle and considerate. She smiled on him encouragingly.

'It is mettle that makes the man-at-arms,' said she. 'I would have chosen you indeed, young sir, had these merry gossips of yours brought you to me sooner. Never mind, you shall ride to-day for Mary Hamilton.'

The young eyes glistened with pride and happiness; the young heart swelled. Those few kind words had riveted it for ever to the cause of Queen Mary.

The English Ambassador, who in compliance with the directions of his Court mingled in all the amusements at Holyrood, and who was as skilled in arms as in policy, now presented himself before the ladies. Mr. Randolph's costume, as one of the six savages, was remarkably well-chosen and appropriate. A bear-skin hung from his shoulders, and he had decked himself and his horse with wreaths of holly, of which the red berries were strung and looped together as savages wear their beads. He dropped on one knee to mistress Beton, craving permission to carry her good wishes with him in the ensuing courses; and Alexander Ogilvy in the dress of the opposite party looked on and wished he was an ambassador too, or at least might woo that haughty dame so frankly without fear of a rebuff.

The lace on Mary Beton's collar vibrated with pleasure as she bowed a gracious affirmative. In truth the stately lady was insensibly beginning to take no small pleasure in the attentions of her diplomatic admirer.

Mary Seton in the mean time had been inspecting with sarcastic scrutiny the persons and accoutrements of all the competitors. With a stinging jest or biting retort she had refused to accept the homage of one after another, and finally took as her knight one John Sempill, an Englishman, who had sought refuge at the Court of Holyrood, a plain silent man, who appeared somewhat surprised to find himself in a scene of merry-making, and whose only recommendation in the eyes of the maid-of-honour must have been that he was the direct opposite of herself.

There was yet one of the Maries who had not chosen her champion. All unconscious that there could have been a witness to her *rendezvous* in the Abbey-garden, Mary Carmichael rejected candidate after candidate, in hopes the right one would apply at last. With a brighter eye and a deeper colour than usual she followed in the train of her mistress, and more than one gallant observed that he had never seen mistress Carmichael to such advantage, and were it not for the Queen, she would carry off the palm of beauty from all upon the ground.

But the eye grew dim by degrees and the colour faded, as Walter Maxwell, habited like a savage, remained aloof, standing apart, busy with the caparison of his horse, and obviously anxious to avoid notice and conversation. A sleepless night had somewhat paled

his cheek, but otherwise his look was as composed and reserved as usual. A manly nature is as much ashamed of disclosing mental suffering as physical pain.

The girl was puzzled: she could not understand him: yesterday, so kind and loyal and frank; to-day, so distant and calm and cold. Had he been the most experienced carpet-knight that ever made war upon the sex, instead of an honest true-hearted soldier, he could not have adopted a better method of aggression. She had never felt so much engrossed with him in her life. It is hardly fair to fight a woman with her own weapons; but we imagine it discomfits them exceedingly, the more so that they are well aware a man's coldness, unlike their own, is the result of real displeasure, and the forerunner of a rupture.

Eventually all the ladies had chosen but Mary Carmichael; all the horsemen were selected but Walter Maxwell. She detached herself from the rest, and walked to where he was standing apart, still fastening his bridle and caressing his good horse.

She tried to speak in an easy off-hand manner; but a duller ear than his might have detected the forced tone of her voice.

'They are mounting,' said she; 'you will be left out. Will you not be my knight?'

'For to-day,' he answered, bowing low, and with a strained courtesy more galling than actual rudeness.

Then he too sprang into the saddle and galloped off to join his comrades. The girl bit her lip till the blood came, tears of shame and vexation rose to her eyes, and yet she had never liked him so well as at this moment.

The Queen with her ladies now returned to the gal-

lery, from whence she could have a good view of the sports, dispensing once more amongst the crowd that good-humoured notice which is so fascinating from a Sovereign. Many a reflective Scotch face smoothed its rugged brows as she passed: many a stern Protestant who followed weekly the vigorous discourses of John Knox with approval in proportion to the strength of their doctrine, and attention never diverted for a moment from the profound casuistry of their arguments, looked after her with a wistful pitying admiration, as though loth to believe such a creature of light could be a chosen tool of the arch-enemy, and a vessel of wrath doomed to everlasting perdition. The younger members of the crowd blessed her audibly, while here and there some godless jackman ruffling it in all the audacious freedom of inebriety, swore loudly that it was his profession and his pastime to die for the Queen.

The Earl of Moray and his bride occupied the next seats to the royal household. Matrimony had not altered the composure of the deep-scheming Earl. His own attire and that of his lady were of the gravest and most sombre, rebuking by their austere simplicity the bravery of the Queen's immediate attendants.

Moray, while he kept well with the Court, was careful not to offend the prejudices of the strict Protestant party, in whose ranks he felt lay his chief strength, and while he smiled with a melancholy forbearance on the gaieties of his brothers and his royal half-sister, he never forgot for an instant the character he had assumed, of the rigid guardian and upholder of religion: the man in whom the 'country might have confidence,' the prop and stay of 'the godly' through the length and breadth

of Scotland. His bride, a comely laughing lass when she married him, was obviously taming down, day by day, to the required pattern of decorum. Like some flower denied the sun-light, she was fading from her youthful colour and brightness, into that premature old age which it is so pitiful to witness—the waning of the heart and feelings before the face is wrinkled or the locks are grey.

And now the crowd are driven from the enclosure by a score of men-at-arms wearing the royal livery. As these push their well-trained horses amongst the foot-people, much elbowing and squeezing is the result. The *lads*, as Scotchmen are termed up to the most advanced period of life, bear the jostling good-humouredly enough; the lasses laugh and shriek, and display extraordinary unsteadiness, and an unusual craving for protection and support. But the lists are cleared at last, and the troop of mounted masquers come down like a whirlwind, in line, till they reach the Queen's gallery, when they wheel to right and left from their centre, and sweeping round at the same pace, take up their respective positions at either extremity of the lists.

In Her Majesty's gallery, eager eyes are watching their movements. The Queen and her ladies criticize both steeds and horsemanship pretty freely, wagering gloves and trinkets on the result, but Mary Carmichael sits pale and silent, and sees everything in a mist because she cannot keep back her tears.

The ring is up, and borne off fairly by several of the cavaliers. All acquit themselves with knightly prowess, but some of the horses are unsteady, and Lord John Stuart shooting at a gallop past the object,

of which he has only struck the outer edge, encounters amongst the spectators the laughing face of mistress Alison Craig.

‘Fie on ye!’ exclaims that unabashed dame, loud enough for the discomfited nobleman to hear; ‘an’ ye ride no better than that, ye’ll never wear the orange and black in your bonnet again on Leith sands!’

He cannot choose but laugh as he recalls his prowess the year before among the citizens while carrying the colours of the mercer’s daughter, and mistress Alison with becoming modesty puts down her wimple to hide the cheek that has long since forgotten how to blush.

At last Mr. Randolph, young George Douglas, Walter Maxwell, and Chastelâr, alone remain to contest the prize. One failure withdraws the competitor, and but these four have borne away the little circlet at each attempt with graceful skill. The excitement amongst the ladies increases visibly, and there is an obvious feeling in favour of the handsome child, for he is scarcely more, who wears on his amazonian helmet the Bleeding Heart of the House of Douglas.

The crowd too cheer the boy lustily. The people have alternately loved and feared the Douglas since the days of ‘Good Lord James,’ but their Scottish hearts warm to that grand old line, and the lad’s youth and beauty are sure to tell on such an assemblage as the present. He flushes to the eyes and casts a look at the Queen’s gallery, then couches his lance and drives his horse furiously to his course.

Hand and seat and eye, all are true enough, but he is going a little too fast, and the glittering object is

missed by a hair's breadth. As he leaps from the saddle at the end of his career, the boy bursts into tears, and withdraws to hide his face amongst the crowd.

Mr. Randolph also fails, but with a grace and dignity that in Mary Beton's opinion are more creditable than success itself.

Chastelâr, who, to the natural dexterity of a Frenchman, has added the skill acquired by constant practice, once more carries off the ring, and glances proudly at the Queen as he brandishes it aloft on the point of his lance.

Again it is Maxwell's turn to try his fortune. Mary Carmichael's heart beats painfully. If he wins the prize how will he act? By all the laws of chivalry he must lay the ring at her feet, and she must deliver him the costly trophy. Already she anticipates the moment of triumph. Shall she enjoy it coldly and with dignified displeasure, making him as unhappy as she has been herself? No; she longs to forgive him, and be friends. All these disquietudes are wholly unnecessary; as he arrives within a stride of the object, his horse falls, rolls over him, and both disappear in a cloud of dust. Mary Carmichael utters a faint shriek and then sits cold and rigid like a statue. At this moment, the Queen discovers the secret of her maid-of-honour.

Chastelâr then turns his horse round, carries off the ring once more, and lays it at the Queen's feet, his dark eyes flashing with excitement.

With the graceful courtesy that becomes her so well, Mary presents the prize to the successful competitor.

‘One more trophy,’ says the Queen, ‘to the Troubadour, who wins all hearts by the sweetness of his songs, and who wields the lance as successfully as the pen.’

Chastelâr strives to speak in reply, but his voice fails him and he turns ashy white. Mary Hamilton watching him from behind her mistress almost expects him to fall from his horse. He recovers himself after a short interval, and mutters a few unintelligible sentences; then opening the purse, scatters its contents amongst the multitude, and dismounting, falls upon his knees, and replaces the heart in the Queen’s hands.

‘Will you not keep it, Madam,’ says the poet in a hoarse broken voice, ‘a tribute from the humblest and most devoted of your worshippers; fitting emblem of all Chastelâr has to give? A pure heart of sterling gold is the most appropriate offering that can be presented to the Queen of Grace and Beauty.’

Somewhat unprepared for the compliment, Mary accepts it with a little confusion, and the crowd shouting loudly, testify their approval of the generosity as well as the prowess displayed by the Frenchman.

Some discontent has indeed been manifested at the success of a foreigner, but the freedom with which the broad pieces have been scattered about has rapidly converted all invidious demonstrations into cordial applause. On such terms they would gladly see him win hearts and purses every day.

Though stunned and shaken for the moment, Maxwell was not seriously hurt. After changing his costume for his ordinary attire, he rejoined the party of gallants and ladies that had congregated round the Queen. A fall with a horse is no very serious affair

to an accomplished cavalier in the pride of youth and strength; his bearing was as composed as usual, and save a mischievous glance from Mary Seton, and a little short speech of condolence, in which good-nature and sarcasm were strangely mingled, little notice was taken of his mishap. While the Queen, however, whose French education had not destroyed her predilection for pedestrian exercise, made her way back to the palace on foot, followed by her train, mistress Carmichael lingered behind the others till she found herself next to the fallen cavalier; and as he walked on for a time without speaking, she summoned up courage at last to take the initiative.

‘I must condole with my knight,’ said she; ‘he did his part well, and had his horse not failed him I think we should have carried off the prize.’

She spoke with a constrained effort at playfulness, and was conscious that her heart beat very fast the while. Whence came this new feeling of subjection? She never used to be afraid of him like this.

‘I should like to have won it for *your* sake,’ he answered, but very coldly and gravely. ‘You and I will have but little in common, mistress Carmichael, after to-day.’

‘What do you mean?’ she gasped, thoroughly frightened now and too anxious to be indignant; but ere he could reply the train of courtiers had already dropped back to them, and Mary Carmichael was compelled to join her companions with a weight of grievous apprehension at her heart.

Another sentence might perhaps have cleared up everything, or at least put an end to doubts and mis-

givings ; but how could he speak it with a score of the sharpest ears at Court ready to catch every syllable as it fell ? Perhaps an explanation might never arrive, or if it did would come too late ; perhaps pride might rise up to prevent it, or the opportunity never occur at all : and thus originate half the misunderstandings and estrangements that embitter the whole existence of those, who could they but speak three words to each other alone, would never doubt or mistrust in their lives again.



CHAPTER XVI.

‘Knights were dancing by three and three,
There was revel, game and play,
Lovely ladies fair and free,
Dancing with them in rich array.

FLOODS of light were again streaming through the lofty halls of Holyrood. Music was pealing loud and harmonious above the ringing of wine-cups, the clatter of a banquet, and the merry din of voices. Massive plate emblazoned with the royal arms of Scotland glittered on the board; silks, satins, and jewels shone and sparkled around it. In goblets of gold the red wine bubbled to the brim, and stately heads were bent and bright eyes glistened while gallants laughed and whispered, and ladies blushed and smiled. All that luxury could lavish, all that refinement could require, enhanced the splendour of the feast. Tall, elaborate devices of architecture, mythology, and fancy, peering from amongst winter plants and flowers, decked the tables; whilst the very claws of the pheasants and moor-fowl were gilt ere they were served: the peacock, roasted yet not despoiled of his sleek plumage, offered a lordly delicacy; and the boar's head garnished with rosemary

grinned its fierce welcome with the customary apple in its mouth.

At a cross table, behind a huge candelabra, shedding a refulgent light on her features, and in front of a side-board piled with rich plate and burnished trenchers, till she seemed literally enshrined in gold, sat the Queen with the most distinguished of her nobility on either hand. Her face was radiant with animation, for pomp and pleasure were not without their charms to her impressible nature; and her manner, as her guests could not but observe, combined inimitably the cordiality of the hostess with the dignity of the Sovereign. Her Maries were placed at the adjoining tables, and more fortunate than their mistress, had at least the chance of sitting next those individuals in whose conversation they took especial pleasure. These lotteries, however, are very apt to turn up an unreasonable proportion of blanks, and while Mary Carmichael could not even see where Walter Maxwell was supping, and mistress Beton to her dismay, found herself placed three seats off from the English Ambassador, Mary Hamilton alone saw the seat next her occupied by the person whose society she liked best in the world, and none but herself knew how she trembled when her cup was filled by the poet Chastelâr.

Is it not always so? We take incalculable pains to prepare for our festivities; how anxious we are that they should *go off* well; how engrossed is the butler with his plate-basket and his ice-pail; how concerned the host that my lord's venison should not be over-done. Every plait must be laid to a hair's-breadth in the glis-

tening tresses of the lady of the house. Two mirrors satisfy her, at last, that folds and flounces and flowers are all adjusted to a nicety, but still there weighs on her mind the list of precedence, and the probable contingency that the most important guest may not turn up at all. Perhaps it may come across even her conventional mind that there are games for which it is scarce worth while to purchase such expensive candles, and that a two o'clock dinner with the children is a more agreeable repast, after all. Aye! even at the best, there is a speck on the *épergne*, an earwig in the flower-basket, a flavour of wormwood in the liquid amber called champagne. *Surgit amari* over and over again! Perhaps it was not so in that banquet of which the halt and the maimed and the blind were invited to partake. Perhaps there are no insects in a dinner of herbs; no heart-burnings in the crust we share with Hunger; no bitter drop in that cup, though it be but cold water, wherewith we pledge celestial Charity, and 'entertain an angel unawares.'

Chastelâr was flushed and pre-occupied; thus much was apparent to the eyes that watched him with such eager interest. Ever and anon he glanced uneasily towards the royal table, but ere long something he noticed there seemed to give him intense satisfaction, and filling his goblet to the brim, he devoted himself, like an accomplished gallant, to his fair neighbour. Such is the nature of his sex. A woman always feels a little humbled when she thinks she has been too gracious, even towards a favourite; a man, on the contrary, though his affections may be fixed elsewhere, considers

it due to himself to be as captivating as he can. And then they talk of female vanity and female love of admiration!

‘I was sorry for my young knight to-day,’ said Mary Hamilton, not, it must be confessed, very truthfully, and without raising her eyes to her companion’s face. ‘Poor boy, he would have been so pleased to win. I wish he had carried off the prize.’

Chastelâr could not forbear giving her a meaning look.

‘And yet you did not choose him,’ he said. ‘He was given you by the Queen. Did he really carry your good wishes with him, mistress Hamilton? I marvel his lance could fail: if I had thought that, mine would hardly have been so steady.’

He scarce knew what he was saying. Flushed with success, intoxicated with his own wild happiness; excited as such imaginative natures are by music, lights, wine, and beauty, he was in that reckless mood which drains pleasure eagerly from every cup and thinks not of to-morrow.

‘You are jesting with me,’ she answered, in a low trembling voice.

Oh! had he known how these light words of his thrilled to that kind unsuspecting heart, he would have spared her for very pity’s sake.

‘Nay, fair mistress,’ he replied gaily, ‘I do not jest with *you*; there are some with whom to break jests is like breaking lances, sharp pointed ones too, and ending in a combat à l’outrance. I am afraid of you, mistress Hamilton.’

‘Why so?’ she asked, looking up at him with her clear guileless eyes. ‘Am I so very formidable? You do not seem much afraid of anything to-night.’

A gleam of triumph shot from his eyes, and once more he glanced towards the upper end of the hall, then lowering his voice he whispered,

‘There are contests in which to win is as perilous as to lose. There are lists in which the true knight fights unarmed whilst his adversary is clothed in steel. Give me my *coup-de-grâce*, mistress Hamilton,’ he added, with a bright smile, ‘I must depart now to prepare for the masque. Before I go I yield me “rescue or no rescue.”’

‘You have a merciful gaoler’ was all she could trust herself to reply; but as he rose from his seat and left the hall, Mary Hamilton’s eyes followed him with a wistful longing gaze, and Mary Hamilton’s heart thrilled in her bosom, with a keen sense of pleasure that was not far removed from pain.

Meanwhile the banquet progressed merrily, not uncheered by those lively strains that have made Scotch music, from time immemorial, so appropriate to all scenes of merry-making or excitement. Wine, too, flowed freely, for the stalwart barons would, indeed, have deemed themselves wanting in respect to their Sovereign had they stinted their accustomed measure because they sat at a Queen’s table. Thirsty souls they were, some of those iron old paladins, and quaffed such mighty draughts as their degenerate descendants would scarce believe; but it was observed that those among them who were most liberal in their potations,

became also graver, more dignified, and sententious, in proportion to the quantity they imbibed.

Here and there a vacant scat might be perceived as several gallants quitted the feast by stealth to prepare for the coming pageant, which was tacitly conceded to be a surprise.

Ere long the lower tables at the extremity of the hall were drawn, and their occupants gathering round the royal circle, began to display that flutter of expectation which pervades all assemblies when there is anything to be seen.

Presently two grave ushers with white wands threw open the folding doors, and amidst peals of laughter from the men and exclamations of astonishment, not without a shriek or two from the ladies, in rushed a troop of satyrs, and commenced clearing a space in the middle of the hall for the further exhibition of the performances.

These masquers were in uncouth and fantastic disguise: their flesh-coloured coverings were adorned with wreaths of oak-leaf and ivy; horns sprouted from their brows; goat-skins covered their nether limbs, which terminated in cloven feet; and long tails depended from their backs, which they brandished in their hands and used as whips to clear a passage in the throng.

The Queen clapped her hands, and laughed aloud.

‘None but Sebastian could have plotted this,’ she exclaimed. ‘Come hither, ’Bastian, that we may thank thee for thine ingenious device.’

The satyr thus summoned, who seemed indeed the leader of the rest, and no mean representative of the god Pan, approached the royal presence with quaint

reverence, beating a measured dance with his cloven feet, and brandishing his tail the while.

James Geddes, the fool, in an irrepressible state of excitement, could not forbear imitating his gestures with a grotesque fidelity that provoked shouts of laughter.

Sebastian, somewhat irritated, and taking advantage of his position, struck at him viciously with his tail; but the fool, familiar with such salutes, dodged it adroitly, and the blow fell across the shapely leg of the English Ambassador, who winced and turned crimson with the pain.

Mr. Randolph, however, had far too much self-command to betray his anger, which was little alleviated by the laughter that the Queen could not repress.

‘How now?’ quoth the statesman, trying hard to force a smile; ‘Is Pan like Atropos, that he spares neither Wisdom nor Folly, but smites down all alike?’

‘It’s the knave aye gets the fule’s arles,’* remarked James; ‘or he wadna be siccan a knave; an’ it’s the fule aye tynes† them, or he wadna be siccan a fule!’

And so speaking he sat composedly down at the Queen’s feet, pulling a grimace at the same time that was too much even for the Earl of Moray’s gravity.

The satyrs then proceeded to enclose a space for the coming masque. So thorough was their disguise as to baffle even the keen eyes of those who were most interested in their identity; and as the sylvan monsters

* Wages.

† Loses.

ranged themselves on each side the hall, soft voices behind them whispered,

‘Are you Sholto?’ or ‘It *must* be Archibald!’ to receive no more satisfactory answer than a stifled laugh.

A flourish of music now announced the continuation of the pageant, and the three planets, Mercury, Mars, and Venus, made their appearance, habited in robes of silver gauze and spangles: the first, winged strictly according to mythology at head and heel; the God of War armed with glittering helmet, flashing buckler, and greaves of burnished gold; and the Queen of Beauty, represented by young George Douglas, extremely embarrassed with her draperies, and blushing as Venus surely, save on one memorable occasion, never blushed in her life.

These representations of the starry host were then succeeded by the Nine Muses, all in different colours, and notwithstanding their beardless faces and classical folds, displaying legs unusually muscular for Muses, and also a good deal more limb than is customary with that sex to which ‘the tuneful Nine’ are supposed to belong.

Melpomene, too, could not forbear laughing outright; Clio, albeit the daughter of memory, forgot whether she was herself or Urania; and Terpsichore, somewhat flushed with sack, caught her feet in her petticoats, and narrowly escaped the indignity of entering the royal presence on her head. They trooped off, however, after making their obeisance to the Queen, and ranged themselves in front of the satyrs on either side the hall.

After them a score of cavaliers, mounted on the

well-known hobby-horse, of which the sweeping housings concealed its rider's real legs, whilst his false ones dangled outside in ludicrous unison with its gambols, plunged and frolicked into the apartment. Half were represented as huntsmen, half as heathen Turks, and they blew their horns or brandished their scimitars with an energetic gravity edifying to behold. One truculent looking Saracen earned immortal honour by the life-like manner in which he backed his hobby-horse the whole length of the hall, and then caused it to rear straight-on-end ere he took up his position, counterfeiting inimitably the coquetry of the practised rider, and the repressed mettle of the unwilling yet obedient steed. Some of the courtiers whispered that it was Lord John Stuart, others, the Grand Falconer; not a few believed it to be the Warden of the Marches in disguise; but the better informed were all the time aware that it was no less a personage than Her Majesty's head cook.

Then came pilgrims decked with sandals and scallop-shell, leading with them bears, wolves, tigers, and an occasional unicorn; all these quadrupeds presenting alike the anomaly of a pair of hind legs jointed the wrong way, but performing their parts in other respects with decorous fidelity, and an obvious difficulty in keeping up with their leaders. These were succeeded by musicians bearing lutes, harps, wind instruments and guitars, dumb indeed in reality, but going through all the motions of a lively measure, which the Queen's real musicians were playing for their encouragement.

Next came two little cupids armed with silver bows and baldricks, their rosy limbs uncovered, and their

golden curls mingling with the wings of gauze that stood from their shoulders. Pretty urchins they were, but somewhat too young for their task, and already rubbing their sleepy eyes with dimpled little fists. Hand-in-hand they trotted into the hall boldly enough, but ere half the distance was accomplished their hearts failed them, they stopped, looked about them, and one began to cry. This was too much for his little companion's philosophy, who incontinently followed his example, but both were immediately caught up by some of the ladies, and quickly caressed into composure. The Queen, too, had them brought to her forthwith, and soothing them with kind words and sweet-meats, sent them to bed happy and consoled.

During this unexpected interlude, the principal feature of the pageant, and one which had tasked to the utmost the ingenuity of its contrivers, now entered the hall. It consisted of a fleet of ships constructed of light wicker-work, and moved upon wheels, which were worked unseen from within. The sides of these galleys were formed of cloth, coloured to represent beams of cedar, fastened and inlaid with gold; the masts and spars were gilt, the tackle of silver tissue, and the sails of gauze. A murmur of admiration greeted the pageant as it glided up the hall with the stately motion of ships sailing over a smooth sea.

On the deck of each bark stood an unknown lord dressed with the utmost magnificence, and closely masked. So resolved were these silken pirates not to be identified, that their doublets, their hose, and even their gloves were padded so as to conceal the shape of their figures, their limbs and their very hands. They

were known to be gallants of the Court but that was all. The nobles laughed and applauded, their dames whispered and speculated, when, with a burst of music rising into loud triumphant tones, the ships increased their speed, and the leading galley closely followed by the rest, bore swiftly down upon the circle which contained the Queen and her ladies with obvious intention of a capture.

Each masquer took a partner by the hand, and courteously entreated her in dumb show to enter his gorgeous bark. The Queen first set the example of compliance, and amidst shouts of admiration the barks veered round, and doubly freighted, floated once more proudly down the hall.

Then the squadron divided, the sails were furled, the voyagers disembarked, and each gallant kneeling low as he gave his hand to his companion and helped her to alight, unmasked at the same instant, while the music changing to a merry lilt, the couples found themselves arranged in due order to tread a well-known measure called 'the Purpose,' on the polished floor.

This 'Purpose,' as it was called, a word which signified confidential conversation, was a dance resembling the cotillion so popular with our grandmothers, and not entirely despised to-day when lights are waning after a night of festivity, and gloves are soiled, and flowers faded, and cheeks begin to pale before the coming dawn. Then is the moment to infuse fictitious vigour borrowed from excitement into the closing scene—then the careful mother at the emptying doorway, with shawl and wrapper on her braceleted arm, waves her unwelcome summons to the bounding damsel

warmed up into bloom once more, and every turn is precious now because every turn must be the last. Then shall the prey, which has been playing round it all night, gorge the glittering bait for good and all. Wind up the reel, in with the tackle, out with the landing-net,—gold-fish or gudgeon, he is gasping helpless on the bank; but had it not been for the cotillion, he might have been wriggling his tail even now in derision through the elusive waters, might have despised the fire and ignored the frying-pan to this day.

The 'Purpose' was so called because the figure exacted that at stated intervals the couples should dance together through the doorway into an adjoining room, and having made the circuit of that apartment, should return, unbosomed of any secrets they might have had to interchange, to the rest of the laughing company. It was a figure obviously adopted for the triumph of coquetry and the discomfiture of mankind.

The leading pirate had dutifully borne off the Queen, and when he unmasked, Mary discovered that Chastelâr was to be her partner in the dance. The poet's manner was more full of deference than usual, but there was a light of unearthly happiness in his eye.

Randolph had secured Mary Beton nothing loth. That very morning the Ambassador had received instructions from his Government to leave no stone unturned till he had discovered the Queen's predilections amongst the numerous marriages that were proposed to her, all and each of which gave Elizabeth such disquiet. He proceeded now deliberately to sound her principal

maid-of-honour, under cover of making fierce love to her himself.

With the loud music and the long intervals of inaction there was ample opportunity for the process.

‘We shall soon have nobler doings even than these,’ observed Mr. Randolph, whispering confidentially to his partner, ‘when another royal wedding gladdens the walls of Holyrood. Shall we dance the Spaniard’s bolero, or the Austrian’s gavolte, or our own old English brawl? Whatever be the measure, mistress Beton, my only hope is that we may dance it together.’

Randolph looked very tenderly at her while he spoke, and his partner’s ruff heaved visibly.

‘Nay, you statesmen are too premature,’ she replied. ‘Ladies are not to be thus wooed and won in a day, much less queens. The Arch-duke, Don Carlos, Lord Robert, which of them can be called a fitting mate for our Sovereign? You must not hurry us thus, Mr. Randolph; you are indiscreet.’

‘And cannot you guess why I am so anxious for your mistress to marry?’ whispered the insidious statesman, pressing nearer his listener. ‘Is it not that alone which will free her beautiful maidens from their self-imposed celibacy? Till that auspicious day even our thoughts are not our own, and a man of honour must be tongue-tied on the subject nearest his heart.’

Mary Beton blushed and trembled. It was almost a declaration, and from that impenetrable and capable man! The staid maid-of-honour was losing her head every moment.

‘It may come sooner than any of us think,’ she murmured, giving him her hand to lead her, as the dance demanded, on their tour through the rooms. ‘Sooner than any of us desire,’ she added, with a sudden resumption of her usual stateliness.

He pressed the hand affectionately, and his voice became exceedingly trusting and confidential. Mr. Randolph was a man who never hesitated to waste a sprat for the purpose of catching a salmon.

‘It will not be Lord Robert,’ said he. ‘I can tell you that, though it is as much as my life is worth. But I would trust you with my head, beautiful mistress Beton; far rather than my heart,’ he added, in a low fond voice; ‘were it not indeed too late to make that reservation.’

The lights seemed to swim in Mary Beton’s eyes, and the music was like surging water in her ears. A true woman, despite her natural caution and her court education, she returned confidence for confidence.

‘They do talk of a bridegroom,’ she whispered. ‘It is a secret, Mr. Randolph; but I feel I am safe with you. The Countess of Lennox has already suggested her son, and I think the Queen is not averse to the idea. If it *should* ever be,’ she added, with rising colour and some hesitation, ‘we shall be differently circumstanced of course, and, in short, the future must always be uncertain for us all.’

He replied with less warmth than she perhaps expected; but his commonplaces were extremely polite, nay complimentary, and when he led her back to the company, there was that complacent expression on his

countenance, which is worn by a man who finds, in the hand dealt him, the leading card of the game.

Far different was 'the purpose' entertained by Walter Maxwell and Mary Carmichael, in their interval of conversation. With the frank kindliness of his nature, that honest gentleman had determined at least to ask an explanation ere he condemned at once and for ever the woman he felt he still loved only too well.

With this intention he had joined the merry band of masquers, though his heart was sadly out of tune for mirth, and had carried off his mistress without hesitation from the fair circle who were waiting to be abducted. Nay, when he unmasked, and mistress Carmichael, who had recognised him from the first, stole a look at his face, it wore its usual grave but kindly expression, and the displeasure which had so discomfited her all day, and spoilt her gaiety all night, had entirely disappeared. He was determined to be just and kind and temperate in his dealing with her, though more than life depended on the result.

When he spoke it was in a low soft voice, but every syllable was strangely emphatic and distinct.

'I behaved unkindly in the Queen's Park,' said he, 'but I was hurt and offended at your conduct. Had I not cause?'

She blushed, yet her eye was bright with repressed exultation.

'How have I offended you?' she asked quickly. 'I would not do so willingly, you know.'

'I thought you different from the others,' he resumed with more agitation. 'In common charity I ask

to be undeceived. Did I not see you in the Abbey-garden the night before last?’

She trembled all over, but looked him full in the face nevertheless, yet so scared, so startled.

‘What then?’ she murmured in obvious agitation.

‘You were not alone,’ he continued with a severe brow; ‘who was your companion?’

She drew a long breath as if immensely relieved, nay, she almost smiled as she replied,

‘Then you do not know? you cannot even guess?’

‘Had I known,’ he answered significantly, ‘it would not have been the lady I should have questioned.’

She raised her head haughtily.

‘And by what right do you question the lady now?’ she exclaimed. ‘Am I answerable to Walter Maxwell for my conduct? I take leave to think, sir, you might be better employed than in watching my movements.’

He was growing very angry and consequently calmer every second.

‘You had rather give no explanation?’ he said, with studied politeness.

She bowed her head in silence, but the colour was fading faster and faster from her cheek.

‘You decline it?’ he added, still very low, but through his set teeth.

‘Distinctly!’ answered the lady, adding, as only a woman would at such a moment, ‘You are neglecting the figure, the dance is going on without you.’

After this the pair derived but small gratification we imagine from the amusements of the evening. Walter Maxwell took the earliest opportunity of departing to cool his irritation in the night air, whither, as we dis-

like seeing a strong man wrestling with pain, we will not follow him. Mary Carmichael, however, bore her part bravely to the end, and although her answers were at times a little absent and her laughter somewhat misplaced, none could have guessed by her outward bearing that she had so recently seen the great stake of her life's happiness set, played for, and lost. She was not the only gambler in the hall. There was one heart amongst those dancers within a few yards of her that had resolved to-night to play the great game in which the odds were incalculably against it, and which to lose was ruin entire and irretrievable. There were a couple now gracefully moving through the figure of 'the Purpose,' as the music swelled and sank in triumphant harmony or pleading sweetness, of whom one was enjoying unconsciously the gratification of the moment, gay, kindly, generous, and impressionable, yet calm and dignified because thinking no evil, and the other with beating heart and swimming brain was steeped to the lips in the intoxication of that madness which comes but once in a life-time, and seems to have but one fatal and invariable result.

Woe to the idolater! It is written on the tables of stone: Woe to the idolater! Be the image what it may, wood, brass, or marble, or one 'a little lower than the angels,' whom the worshipper must needs exalt above the Being to whom the Heavenly Host itself is but as dust in the hollow of a man's hand. The punishment shall not come from abroad; it shall not be wrought by foreign enmity, nor owe its keenest pang to foreign injustice. If so, the sting would be extracted; the vengeance incomplete. No; Dagon alone shall

crush the deluded votary who grovelled at Dagon's pedestal. It is the hand he trusted that shall strike him to the heart, the feet he kissed that shall spurn him in the dust. When he shall have stripped himself of all to do his false god service; when he shall have lost his friends, his wealth, his fame, his self-respect, and forfeited his honour, and pawned his birth-right, then, and not till then, shall the image of stone rock and totter and fall upon him and crush him to powder. Were there no world but this, it would indeed be better for that man that he had never been born.

The Dagon of to-night was fair to look on, queenly and graceful and gloriously beautiful. It seemed unnatural to refuse her homage; it seemed ecstasy to kneel and supplicate and adore. The worshipper was in the wildest stage of his idolatry. He looked for no greater glory than to lay down life and heart and soul at her feet.

What good results could come from such a link between the lovely Queen of Scotland and the infatuated minstrel of France?



CHAPTER XVII.

'He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.'



MARY STUART still wore in her bosom the gold heart that had been won by Chastelâr in his victory of the day. This it was that had so elated him at the banquet; this it was that gave him courage in the dance to speak words of love to his Queen.

The distant music had subsided to a low plaintive strain; the apartment into which, in their turn, the two had seemed to float upon those floods of melody, was bathed in a subdued and softened light; the odour of perfumes loaded the atmosphere; and the sounds of far-off revelry did but add to the languor and seclusion of the scene. Mary's cheek was a shade paler and her step scarce so buoyant as usual. She seemed fatigued, and whilst awaiting the louder peal of music that should summon them back to the dance, the Queen seated herself on a low chair near the doorway and fixed her eyes upon the floor with a dreamy listless gaze. Chastelâr remained standing, bent over her chair as if fascinated,

spell-bound. The music sank lower and lower, and they were alone!

At last the Queen raised her eyes to his, and what she saw there brought the blood reddening to her brow. It broke the charm, however, and the poet found his voice to speak, though his lips trembled so that he could scarcely form his words. He knelt before her as he would have knelt to a saint.

‘Ah! Madam,’ he exclaimed, in broken accents, ‘accept my homage, my thanks, my everlasting gratitude. This is the day in Chastelâr’s life that he had better lay him down and die in his great happiness, for the sun can never shine on such another for him again.’

She smiled on him, half-kindly and half-pitiful.

‘Why should you thus thank me, ‘Chastelâr?’ she said. ‘What have I granted to my Troubadour that is not richly merited by one so loyal, so devoted, and so true?’

She spoke lightly and playfully, yet was there a tone of repressed feeling in her voice. No woman alive could have looked unmoved on the depth of intense devotion that glowed in Chastelâr’s face.

‘Aye, Madam,’ he replied, ‘you have ever been kind and condescending and gracious to your slave. You know not what your notice is to him: how he watches every turn of your face and hangs on every word of your lips. What the blessed sunlight is to creation—its hope, its love, its pride, its whole existence—such is your presence, oh! Mary, oh! my Queen, to me.’

‘Nay,’ she replied, half rising from her seat, and looking round as though not caring that their dialogue should be overheard. ‘Nay, Chastelâr, now you are

trenching on your own prerogative and wasting on my solitary ear the materials for a sonnet which should delight the whole Court; I cannot listen to such compliments from my Troubadour save in verse.

‘You will listen to them thus,’ he exclaimed eagerly. ‘You will allow me to lay at your feet a volume I have long wished, but not dared, to pray you to accept. May I experience this great happiness? Is it a promise?’

She bowed her fair head in acquiescence and her colour went and came. Queen though she were, Mary Stuart was also a woman to the heart’s core, and it was not in woman’s nature but to experience a tinge of gratification and triumph in an authority so despotic, a dominion so complete as this.

Emboldened by the permission he hurried on,

‘I would lay all I have—my fame, my happiness, my life, nay, my very soul—at your Majesty’s feet, and thank and bless you, even did you trample them to dust. Oh! Madam, have you not read of such devotion? can you not believe in it? Do you not *know* that there may exist a love so pure, so holy, so self-denying, that its blessing and its privilege is to give all and ask for nothing in return.’

Again she looked around her startled and confused, but there were no listeners near. Still the strain of the ‘Purpose’ stole soft and low and soothing on her ear. She resolved she must never hear him speak again like this, but the moments were all the more precious at the time. It would be too unkind to check him harshly now. He was madly in love with her, no doubt, and his punishment would come quite soon enough; mean-

time she thought it better to treat the whole affair playfully.

‘I too can write verses,’ said she, with a bright smile. ‘Shall I repeat you a couplet or two I composed to-day; they are not amiss, Chastelâr, at least for a Queen! and considering they are in rhyme, they are tolerably true—too true, I fear, the more the pity. Listen, Troubadour, and take a lesson in your own trade; moreover, beseech you, mark the moral, for that is the whole merit of the stave.’

‘Wild Folly, so the legends tell,
Was wedded to a maid;
A dusky maid that used to dwell
In drowsy summer-shade.

‘Their offspring is a fairy elf,
A thing of tricks and wiles;
He plays with hearts to please himself,
And when they break he smiles.

‘Unpitied pain and toil in vain
That little tyrant brings;
And those who fain would slip his chain
Must cheat him of his wings.

‘To Cupid’s tortures, you may guess,
Each parent lends a part;
The chain, the toils, from Idleness,
While Folly adds the smart.’

‘And yet, Madam, there are chains that the slave hugs to his bosom,’ answered Chastelâr, gazing on her with looks of imploring affection; ‘there is a labour of love that is sweeter than the profoundest repose; there

is a pain that we prize and cherish, clasping it tighter and tighter till it pierces to our hearts, and so we die.'

'Such chains I would not lay on *my* servants,' said the Queen; 'such labour I would never impose; such pain I could not bear to inflict.'

He looked up brightly.

'Say you so, Madam,' he replied; 'then indeed do you give me new life and something to live for; you graciously accepted that trinket from me to-day, and the proudest moment of my existence was when I saw it on your breast to-night—that gold heart is but an emblem of mine own; it is yours, my Queen, if you will deign to take it. Do with it what you will; keep it, or break it, or cast it scornfully away.'

He took the Queen's hand as he spoke and pressed it fervently to his lips; but he had gone too far, and Mary, rising from her chair, snatched her hand from him, and drew herself to her full height

'You forget,' she said, 'you must surely forget where we are and to whom you speak! this is Holyrood, Monsieur Chastelâr, the royal palace of the kings of Scotland, and I am Mary Stuart, its Mistress and its Queen. Lead me back, sir, to the dancers, the music warns us, and do not expect to be forgiven if you should so far presume again.'

She spoke angrily, yet some feeling of compunction smote her the while; and perhaps she was not quite so angry as she looked. She gave him her hand to lead her back to the dance with lofty condescension, and it was remarked on her return to the hall by more than

one acute observer, that the Queen seemed to have quite recovered her fatigue, and that her colour was deeper, her glance brighter, and her step firmer than during the early part of the evening. One pair of eyes too that never left him save when they met his own, that shone with liquid lustre when he was present and filled many a time with unbidden tears when he was far away, gazed wistfully on Chastelâr to-night, and a fond heart wondered why his face was so pale, and his manner so dejected and wild and sad.

Mary Hamilton was one of those characters less rare in her own than in the stronger sex, with whom to use the poet's expression, 'love is its own avenger.' For such, happiness when it does come, should indeed be intense, for their sufferings are acute, their doubts harassing, their self-depreciation unsparing in proportion to the abandonment with which they merge their whole existence in that of another. It is good to love for those who can love *wisely*, but alas! for the self-inflicted tortures of the heart that loves *too well*.

The revel was at its height; louder and louder pealed the music, faster and faster flew the dancers: all seemed bent on the enjoyment of the hour, and resolved that the concluding scene of the festival should be the wildest and merriest of the night. To look at those panting forms, flushed cheeks, bright eyes, and floating tresses, who would have believed but that here, if anywhere, was to be found the gaiety that flings itself without reservation into the pleasures of the moment? Who would have thought there could be room for care or sorrow in the fair bosoms heaving proudly under pearls and gold, or detected the ring of spurious

metal in the joyous tones that told of gratified vanity and partial approbation and careless, thoughtless mirth?

It is better to leave your partner when you have shawled her deftly at the door; there she bids you a cordial, perhaps even a tender 'good night' with her mask on, the same mask you always see, that is painted in such a radiant smile. It comes off though in her dressing room, when the aching temples are released from their garland, and the shining tresses are unbound, and the being that you have envied as a model of good sense, gaiety, and content, sits her down with a weary sigh, and dismissing you and your platitudes, with which she seemed so highly delighted, from her thoughts, leans her head upon her hand while the hot tears trickle through her fingers for the sake of Somebody you never saw or heard of, who is far, far away.

Perhaps you are even with her; perhaps you, too, meeting her gloved hand in the dance, wince under the senseless exterior which you assume with your evening-clothes, in painful consciousness that you cannot quite forget a Somebody of your own, the very rustle of whose dress was music to your ears in the olden golden days that are spent and vanished like a dream; aye, though you seemed so gay and caustic and *debonair* in the cloak-room a while since, when you walk out into the night, the stars you loved to watch for *her* sake long ago look down upon you more in pity than reproach, and the sighing wind reminds you, as it never fails to do, of the gentle face that was all your trust and treasure once, that is lost to you now for

evermore. There is no need for you to hum the refrain of that beautiful song wailing for 'the tender grace of a day that is dead.' Are you likely to forget it, clinging as it does about your heart like ice and chilling you to the marrow even now? Never mind! you have 'done your ball' handsomely and creditably, both to self and partner; it matters little that you are a couple of well-dressed hypocrites, covering your respective sores under broad-cloth and Mechlin lace; you have offered your incense at the conventional altar; you have sacrificed religiously to society; you are at liberty to take off your trappings now and wash the paint from your wan faces, and go both of you away by yourselves to be as wretched as you please.

The Queen and her Maries danced on, fresh and gay to the very last. Even the musician's well-trained fingers seemed less untiring than the ladies' feet. But the revel came to an end soon after midnight, and the sentinels at the palace-gates, relieved at that hour, glanced admiringly after the noble groups that departed in quick succession; some of the older and statelier forms, be it observed, walking with a more staid and solemn air than usual, attributable to the excess of the Queen's hospitality and the excellence of the French wines that graced her table.

There were two individuals, however, now strolling away arm-in-arm with an appearance of great cordiality, who never suffered their brains to be heated beyond their self-control, and who, relying on their wits as the good swordsman on his blade, were careful to keep those weapons constantly bright and keen and

tempered for immediate use. They were engaged even in this friendly promenade, in a kind of moral fencing-bout, with muffled points indeed, and bloodless intentions, yet such as should prove to each his adversary's strength against the future possibility of a real encounter.

Said Mr. Randolph to Secretary Maitland,

‘The revel hath indeed sped gaily. I never witnessed a merrier even at the English Court, where my royal Mistress hath always given so hearty a welcome to the Lord of Lethington. The masques were quaint; the music exquisite; the supper beyond all praise. Holyrood was indeed to-night one blaze of splendour.’

‘And our Scottish ladies?’ asked the Secretary, who had not failed to observe his companion's attentions to mistress Beton, and suspecting his design, glanced curiously at his face, to gather what he could from that inscrutable volume.

The Firth down yonder sleeping in the moonlight could not have been less unruffled than the Englishman's countenance, nevertheless his language was too enthusiastic to be sincere.

‘They are above all praise,’ said he. ‘Were I one of those soft-headed, iron-handed paladins of fifty years ago, I would break any number of lances, in maintaining your Queen and her Maries to be the brightest bevy of beauty in Christendom! But those follies went out with the mass to make room for others! And, by the way, what thinks worthy master Knox and his godly party of all this feasting and fiddling and mummery?’

‘There is a strong feeling of religion amongst our town’s-folk,’ was the guarded answer, ‘combined with loyalty to Her Majesty.’

‘Then they desire to see her wedded,’ resumed Randolph. ‘It rejoices me to hear this, guessing, as I think I can, at the Queen of England’s wishes. Frankly now, and between friends, hath your beautiful Mistress no predilection for any of her wooers?’

‘I am only a statesman,’ answered Maitland, laughing; ‘I can fathom a plot or an intrigue, but a woman’s schemes are far too deep for me. I believe, however, that on this subject ladies are not prone to speak their real minds.’

‘Lord Robert Dudley is a staunch Protestant,’ proceeded Randolph, interrogatively; ‘and a comely personable nobleman besides?’

‘Would your Mistress like to part with him to mine?’ said the other, with increasing mirth. ‘If Dudley aims at a crown-matrimonial, Mr. Randolph, he need not cross the Tweed to fetch it, or we are strangely misinformed in the North.’

‘Nay,’ answered the Englishman, ‘I will be frank with you. The Maiden Queen would be loth to resign either title. But it is not on her marriage that the eyes of all Protestant Europe are fixed. The destiny of the Reformed Church will be strongly influenced by Mary Stuart’s choice of a husband.’

‘She will be guided doubtless in this as in everything, by the wishes of her people and the advice of her royal Cousin,’ was the diplomatic reply. ‘The Austrian and the Spanish match are alike distasteful. The Arch-duke is a grey-beard, and Don Carlos

a puling sickly boy. You see, I can be candid with you. Our Queen will have none of these.'

Mr. Randolph, in common with the general public, had known this important disclosure for weeks. It was his cue, however, to accept the communication for somewhat more than it was worth.

'As we are in confidence, then,' he continued, 'I will round in your ear an idea of mine own. What if the Scottish Queen should unite herself to one of her own blood and of suitable years, thus avoiding all foreign influences, the while she does no violence to her natural inclinations: a goodly young gentleman of honest nurture and of the Reformed religion. Surely such a mate could be found amongst the noble families in both kingdoms.'

It was a leading suggestion from which Randolph hoped to gather a corroboration of Mary Beton's intelligence, but he had to do with one as skilled in state-craft as himself and equally unhampered by compunctions as to truth or sincerity.

'There is none that I can think of,' replied Maitland, with an air of such exceeding candour that the other felt convinced he was telling him a lie. 'Unless it be young Lord Darnley, and there are so many objections to his claim, that although it has often been considered, it has never been entertained for a moment. Is it possible that it would meet with your Court's approval?'

'I cannot answer without instructions,' said Randolph, laughing; and wishing each other 'Good-night,' the well-matched pair separated, without either having gained a decided advantage in the encounter of their wits.

The Laird of Lethington, indeed, who had been acting on the defensive, was satisfied with his own reticence, although his suspicions were aroused, and the eternal question, 'What is he aiming at?' that haunts the diplomatist, followed him to his pillow; but Mr. Randolph was puzzled and discomfited. He could not piece his information together as he liked into one of those perfect specimens of workmanship which he delighted to forward to Secretary Cecil for the inspection of his Queen. Nevertheless he sat up far into the night writing a state-paper to the English grand vizier, and when it was finished, such is the inconsistency of man, dwelt with considerable complacency on the handsome stately image of the lady who had suggested it. The road to power is not often strewn with flowers. Mr. Randolph had no objection to gather them when he could do so without going out of his way, though he was the last man to keep them when withered, or indeed care for them one jot after the first freshness was off their bloom.

But what were the musings of a weary courtier, or even the misgivings of a baffled diplomatist, to the tide of anxiety and anguish that surged through the overwrought brain of Chastelâr, till the poet felt as if he must go mad. Alas! for the gift, dangerous as it is brilliant, of a vivid imagination acting on a deep and tender heart. There are certain insects in the tropics, with which unconscious of the cruelty, ladies are wont to trim their dresses, that sparkle like diamonds when thus impaled in torture: while they suffer they glow, and when they cease to glow they die. So it is with certain temperaments, and those not the dullest nor the

least amiable of their kind. Their very lustre arises from the pain that is goading them within. The flash that sets the table in a roar springs often from an aching heart: the glowing words that clothe immortal thoughts in godlike imagery rise to lips wet with the bitterest draught of all. Who can describe happiness so vividly as he who feels that it can never be his own? Who yearns for beauty with the thirst of him to whom all that is fairest in earth and heaven but mocks the impotence of his despair? If such temperaments enjoy keenly, and indeed it would be hard if they did not, they suffer with an intensity of pain that goads them nearly to madness, and causes them to rush into follies and extravagances such as less ardent natures are never tempted to commit.

Chastelâr left the hall tortured with shame and doubt and fear. Sometimes he wondered at his own recklessness, that could thus risk his very existence on a word, for he felt that if Mary were really offended, and he were banished from the Court, he had better die. Then he taxed the Queen with perfidy, injustice, hardness of heart. Anon, a softer feeling argued that his offence was not of so grievous a nature after all, that the Sovereign might pardon and look kindly on a confession of such devotion to the woman, nay, that it might have been welcome to her and expected long ago; but Mary's image, rising from her chair in offended majesty, dispelled this brighter vision, and though his very heart was flooded with the remembrance of her beauty, the sense of hopelessness that had chilled it so often, seemed to creep over him and paralyse him as of old. At least he felt he could not bear her displeasure. She had turned away from him when he had sought her eye

after the dance. Perhaps she was mortally offended, and would never speak to him again. Like all others, under the same spell, he was totally incapable of judging his own case, and saw everything in a false light. He was even himself aware that he could no longer rely upon his faculties, and yet he felt an irresistible impulse goading him to action, no matter what. There is method in every phase of madness save one, and that is the madness of a man in love.

He paced his room in an agony of irresolution. At last he made up his mind to ask the Queen's forgiveness. He could not sleep without it. He must have it this very night before she retired. He bethought him of the book that she had consented to accept. It was a happy idea: that unconscious little volume should befriend him. He would present it to her on his knees, and would read his sentence in the looks with which she received the token. He was more composed now, and felt as if he were about the most rational proceeding in the world.

Acting on this suggestion, Chastelâr, with his offering in his hand, stole softly through the gallery and up the staircase that led to the Queen's private apartments. The lights were already extinguished, and none were moving in the palace, save one or two tired domestics, loitering drowsily to bed. With a beating heart and noiseless tread he reached the door of an ante-room that led to the Queen's chamber, and paused for an instant to listen. The latch of the door clanked loudly as he opened it, but all was dark within.

Whilst deliberating whether to enter or not, a light shone along the passage, and a measured step, accom-

panied by the rustle of a lady's dress, made his heart leap to his mouth. At this juncture his presence of mind, which had so strangely abandoned him all night, came back in a moment. Without looking to identify the intruder he laid his book upon the door-sill, and stooping down imprinted a kiss on the threshold as one who takes his last leave of the shrine that guards his idol ere he retires. In rising he encountered the Queen herself, still in her robes of ceremony and alone. She was proceeding from the Countess of Argyle's chamber to her own, and had dismissed all her attendants save the two that were even now waiting for her in her bed-room. She started when she saw Chastelâr, and the blood came to her cheek. Was it the light that shone round her like a glory in the poet's heated imagination that produced the semblance, or was it his own fancy, or could it be reality?—he thought her eyes looked wet with tears.

This was too much for his over-wrought feelings. He flung himself at Mary's feet, and taking the skirt of her robe in his hands, literally kissed the hem of her garment again and again.

'Forgive me, Madam, forgive me!' he exclaimed in broken accents and weeping like a woman or a child. 'I could not bear it; I could not rest; I felt I had offended you—I who would die to give you a moment's pleasure. I was mad! I knew not what I did, but I crept here to lay my offering at your feet and to pray for your forgiveness; although you would not know it, would never hear or heed me. Pardon! oh! pardon me, my Queen!'

She could not but pity him; she who was so good

and tender-hearted and pitiful to all: his sorrow was so obvious, his misery so complete. She gave him her white hand and bade him rise to his feet; then she chid him gently, kindly, with a grave sorrow on her young face, like a mother who takes to task a dear but froward child.

‘You would not grieve me, Chastelâr,’ said she, ‘I know. Not one of my Scottish subjects is more loyal and true than my French minstrel. Give me your book; I will accept it as a pledge of your service and fidelity to your Sovereign. To your Sovereign,’ she added, with a significant look, before which his eyes were lowered and his whole countenance fell. ‘I am not only Mary Stuart,’ she added, and perhaps it was but his fancy made him think there was a dash of sadness in her tone, ‘I am the Queen of Scotland as well. This country too is not like France; there are grave eyes watching here to which the lightest matters are a scandal and an offence. Enough of this. I have resolved to trust you, Chastelâr; I will employ you in my service. You will be far from Holyrood, but you will be fulfilling my wishes and furthering my interests. To-morrow you will receive your instructions. Chastelâr, I can count on obedience. Farewell!’

There was a tone of sorrow in her voice and she looked on him very sadly as she passed on into her apartments out of his sight.

Though he heard her words, they were unable to rouse him; though he saw the glance he appeared to heed it not; his frame seemed crushed and powerless; his head was sunk on his breast; when he lifted it she was gone. Then he drew himself up and looked around

him like a man who wakes from some ghastly dream. His face was very white when he walked away, and there was a smile on it not pleasant to behold. You may see such on the face of one who is sentenced to death.

Why should he be pitied? If a man must needs sit down to play his all, whose fault is it that he gets up a beggar? If he grasps at the phial, though it be marked 'Poison,' and drains it to the dregs, what is he to expect? Experience will not warn the gambler, he must go to the workhouse at last; nor Reason stay the hand of the suicide, he must die like a dog—in a ditch.



CHAPTER XVIII.

'To seek hot water beneath cauld ice
I trow it is a great folie ;
I have asked grace at a graceless face,
But there is nane for my men and me.'

THE Queen and her brother sat in grave deliberation in Her Majesty's private apartment. Moray's face betrayed, under its usual composure, a sense of triumph and satisfaction. The scheming Earl had succeeded in bringing about an interview, from which he expected great things, forgetting, as such intriguers often do, the frank nature of his sister, and the uncompromising character of the Churchman whom he wished her to conciliate. He glanced anxiously now and then at the time-piece, for men of his stamp have scant leisure to spare, and something like a smile overspread his features as he detected a bustle in the ante-room which indicated an arrival.

Mary seemed absent and depressed. With her cheek leaning on her hand she had listened to her brother's arguments like one whose thoughts are far away. She was already conscious that the burden of state-craft was too heavy for her to bear ; her young head and

heart, too, were aching under the weight and restrictions of a crown.

She looked up with a weary sigh when the door opened, and a staid usher, too long schooled at Court to betray surprise whatever he might feel, announced the entrance of Mr. John Knox.

The Reformer advanced with the grave dignified air that was habitual to him, and that sprang from no advantages of bodily presence, but from the consciousness of unshaken integrity within. His flowing beard and long black gown accorded well with the severe and thoughtful brow. For an instant, as he lifted his eyes to the beautiful face of his Sovereign, they shone with an expression of pity and admiration that softened his whole countenance; but the gleam was transient, soon to make way for an increased rigidity of demeanour, as the Churchman recalled the sacred nature of his office and the interests he felt commissioned to represent.

The Queen rose when he entered and greeted him courteously. They formed a strange contrast, that pair of disputants: icy Winter and leafy June, the budding hawthorn and the knarled oak branch, the smiling sunbeam and the keen north blast, could not have been more different. For a moment they were silent, and scanned each other narrowly. Her Majesty, as became her rank, was the first to speak.

‘I have summoned you, master Knox,’ said she, ‘for that I would not willingly mistrust a friend, without an explanation, or condemn a subject unheard. There is sedition abroad in Scotland, and those in whom a Queen should put her confidence conspire to bring her authority

to nought. Master Knox, master Knox, can you answer to your Sovereign the heavy charges brought against you?’

‘To *my* Sovereign, and to *hers*,’ replied the Reformer, pointing upward. ‘Confront me with mine accusers, Madam, and I will put them to open shame.’

‘Nay,’ resumed the Queen, glancing at her brother as if for support, ‘I can judge of your sedition for myself. Have you not written a book expressly to overthrow my just government, wherein the casuistry and lore for which you are celebrated have been employed for the worst purpose; but which, nevertheless, I will commission the most learned men in Europe to refute? Have you not stirred up rebellion, and even caused bloodshed, in England, to sap the very foundations of my throne? Have you not practised the black unhallowed art of magic, rather than leave a stone unturned to further your cruel and undutiful enmity against me your Queen?’

‘Madam,’ replied the Preacher, not without a certain sarcastic admiration in his tone, ‘you are skilled in the knowledge of the schools, and for a gentlewoman tolerably familiar with the laws of logic and the rules of disputation. I will answer your charges categorically and in order. If to teach the word of truth to the discomfiture of idolatry; if to exhort the multitude to that worship of the spirit which is alone acceptable in the sight of heaven; if to fulfil the commission of *my* Master by waging war to the death against the Roman Antichrist, to hew down root and branch, and cast into the fire the deadly Upas-tree—its breviaries, its scapularies, its masses, its mummeries, its rank blas-

phemous ceremonials: if this be sedition and rebellion, I plead guilty. If princes are not better served by those who have cast off the yoke of the popish despot, and if subjects are not more loyal who fear God and honour the king, than those who flatter the crown and obey the crozier. If your Grace have not more cheerful homage from your free Scottish people than ever your fathers enjoyed from our priest-ridden forbears,—I plead guilty. If mine enemies can prove that one drop of blood hath ever been shed by my influence or my consent; if they can deny that wherever I have lived, at Geneva, in England, at Berwick, and now in Edinburgh, it has been my constant endeavour to inculcate the doctrines of “peace and good-will,” and God hath so blessed my labours that they have borne fruit an hundred-fold,—I plead guilty. With regard to the charge of magic, I can the more easily bear the brunt of that indictment when I mind me that my Master while on earth was taxed with the same accusation. What said the priests? the priests, Madam, who like your own were fain to own all the wealth and power of earth at the loss of heaven,—“He casteth out devils,” said they, “by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” So far as I have striven to walk in the footsteps of my Master; so far as my weak unworthy efforts have been directed to follow His example,—to this also I plead guilty. But if these charges fail, as fail they must, when your Grace brings your own clear-sighted reason to bear upon them, the verdict will be “not guilty,” and the accusation of rebellion and sedition falls to the ground.’

Mary had been listening with obvious impatience

and no very close attention. She had perhaps made up her mind beforehand. She had again seated herself, and tapped the floor fretfully with her foot, glancing occasionally at her brother as if to ascertain his opinion of the controversy. Moray looked on with the calm approval of a partisan, who thinks his own man is getting the best of it. When Knox paused, the Queen broke in with unusual vehemence,

‘And the book? At least you cannot deny the book, nor its object, nor its reflections on my mother and myself. Even the nice casuistry of master Knox cannot refine away his authorship of that “First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.” Oh! it is a worthy title for a worthy production! and in any other country under Heaven but this it would have brought its writer to the block. By the crown I wear, in a parallel case, my Cousin of England would have had it burnt by the common hangman!’

She breathed quick and gesticulated more than was her wont. She was lashing herself into anger, the gentle Queen, as she thought of her own weakness and Elizabeth Tudor’s strength. Knox met her glance unmoved. When thus embarked on the tide of argument, he was no more to be influenced by force than persuasion; the softest eyes that ever smiled and the sternest brows that ever frowned were alike to him. In the pride of his calling and the fierce delight of disputation, a man of marble within and without.

‘As to the book that so angers your Majesty,’ said he, ‘I own to it freely. Yes, I wrote it deliberately and on reflection, nor is there a position laid down, nor

an argument adduced in the whole of it that I fear to establish and substantiate before any ten of the most learned men in Europe!

‘Then you maintain that I have no just authority even over my own subjects,’ urged the Queen, with difficulty keeping back her tears.

‘These are all fair matters for dispute, Madam,’ was his reply. ‘The learned may surely be suffered to discuss such questions unmolested, when they refrain from putting their theories of good government into practice. Plato himself, as I need scarcely remind your Majesty, argued the necessity of many reforms fundamentally opposed to the very principles of the commonwealth in which he lived. The *littera scripta manet* indeed, Madam; but it is for future generations; and no book written, if left unfortified by persecution, ever yet subverted the authority existent at the time it was composed, and against which it may seem to have been aimed. Besides, Madam,’ added the Churchman, warming into good-humour as he got into the full swing of his oratory, ‘my book was not directed so much against yourself as your name-sake, the bloody Jezebel of England, with her wicked satellites, godless Gardiner and blaspheming Bonner, the one on her right hand and the other on her left! Had I meant to have troubled *your* estate, Madam, would I not have chosen a more fitting time and a weaker breach in the defences, for my assault?’

‘But at least,’ resumed Mary, a little mollified by this admission, ‘ye cannot deny that ye have taught the people to follow a religion different from that of their prince. How is this to be reconciled with the divine

command that subjects should obey their rulers? I cannot wrestle with you in argument, master Knox, I am but a foolish woman after all, yet here, methinks, I have you on the hip.'

He paused a moment, like a true rhetorician, gratified at an opposition he deemed worthy to be controverted.

'The objection, Madam,' he answered, 'is a fair one; yet thus do I demolish it. True religion, it cannot be disputed, cometh from God and not from the King, else why are we enjoined but to honour the latter, whilst we are to fear and consequently obey the former? This is the argument positive. Of the negative I can produce instances in abundance. The following may be thought sufficient: The Hebrews were not to conform to the idolatry of Pharaoh or the self-glorification of Nebuchadnezzar the King, nor were the primitive Christians to practise the degrading superstitions of the Roman Emperors.'

'Good,' replied Mary; 'yet we read not that Jew or Christian was justified in resisting with the sword.'

'The Almighty had not seen fit to give them the power,' answered Knox.

'Then you hold that subjects are entitled to take up arms against their Sovereign,' proceeded Mary; 'in good faith, master Knox, this is a dangerous doctrine even in these lawless times.'

'Extreme means are allowable in extreme cases,' was his reply; 'the father hath authority over his family, but if the father be seized with madness it is lawful for the children to rise up against him and, stripping him of his power, to place him under constraint, for his safety and their own. So is it with princes, Madam; and that

prince who goeth about in his frenzy to commit iniquity must be disarmed, deposed, and cast into prison, until he hath been brought to a more sober mind and disciplined to submission under the will of Heaven.'

It was a bold argument to propound in a royal palace in the presence of majesty itself. The Queen looked at her brother astonished and aghast. True to his part, Moray assumed an air of profound reflection and conviction after mature thought. Again Mary felt goaded to irritation as she wondered how Elizabeth would have brooked a similar discussion, but she commanded herself with a strong effort and shifted her ground for a new attack.

'And where shall we find this will of Heaven declared,' argued the Queen, 'or who shall decide between you and me when each interprets differently the same command?'

'The words of Scripture and the ordinances of the Church are sufficient for our guidance,' replied the Preacher.

'But *your* Church is not *mine*,' retorted the Queen. 'I believe in my heart the Church of Rome to be the true Church of God.'

'Your *will*, Madam,' said the other, 'cannot impose a *reason*, neither doth opinion constitute argument; I am fully prepared to bear witness against the Scarlet Woman, whom ye would fain substitute for the pure Spouse; but I will employ the weapons of controversy, in which mine adversaries are so skilled, to do battle for the right. I will undertake to prove, against the strongest of your priestly disputants, that the Romish Church hath more degenerated from the truth and

purity of apostolical teaching, than the Jews from the ordinances handed down to them by their first law-givers—Moses and Aaron—when they shouted to the Roman governor, that he should crucify the Innocent and let Barabbas go free.’

‘My conscience tells me it is not so,’ answered Mary. ‘I cannot contend with you in argument, as it is neither my profession nor my pleasure; but I have read and studied and formed my own conclusions. Why should not my views be as clear as yours, or may we not both be right?’

‘Impossible!’ thundered Knox. ‘Ye shall come out from the ungodly and shall not be partakers with them, no, not of one single drop in the cup of their abominations. There is but one straight path for monarch and subject, the Queen on her throne and the beggar at the gate. I tell you, Madam, that if you deviate from it one hair’s-breadth you shall be lost in the howling wilderness and become the prey of the raging lion. I will not concede to you one jot nor one tittle; I will prove to you that your tenets are false, your practice sinful, and your ceremonials blasphemous. Stone by stone will I destroy the edifice that priestly ambition hath raised on the foundations of corruption and cemented with the blood of the prophets from time to time, even unto this day. First of all I will demolish the very key-stone on which the whole fabric rests; I will cast down the idol and trample it under my feet; I will testify in the face of all men against the gross and godless mummery of the Mass.’

Mary looked shocked and a little scared at his vehemence; she was irritated too by this unscrupulous

attack on all she held most sacred, but she controlled herself and only replied quietly,

‘Abuse is not argument, master Knox; neither are assertions of much weight until they are proved.’

He settled his gown on his shoulders, and spreading his hands before him, proceeded to demonstrate his propositions in the manner that had become habitual to him in the pulpit, checking off the main points of his argument on his fingers as he proceeded.

‘Ye maintain the Mass,’ said he, ‘to be a sacrifice, and, as such, to be holy in itself, for that things are sanctified which have been once placed upon the altar! Ye argue that in the Scriptures are to be found antitypes that shall support this doctrine, and that Melchizedek, when he brought out bread and wine before Abraham, prefigured the offering which ye now esteem to be the holiest of mysteries. I will not pause to discuss with one of your Majesty’s learning the object with which Melchizedek brought forth these provisions, nor the arguments which may be produced for and against the probability that he simply offered them as refreshment to Abraham and his company. We will let this be for the present, and proceed at once to the very root and core of the matter. Ye shall observe, Madam, that of sacrifices there are two kinds—the sacrifices of propitiation and the sacrifices of thanksgiving—the *propitiatorie* and the *eucharistie*. Now, with regard to the former,’—

‘Hold, sir,’ interrupted the Queen, much to the Divine’s disappointment. ‘Now ye are launched on the depths of controversial divinity, which are too profound for me, and ye would fain confuse and overwhelm

me with your learned Latin terms ; I pray your mercy. Under favour, I shall find those who are better capable than I am of holding their ground in argument against master Knox.'

'So be it, Madam,' answered the Reformer proudly ; 'as in the dark ages our ancestors feared not to encounter the strongest champions armed with fleshly weapons in the lists, so shall I be found, I humbly trust, prompt at the hour of trial to do battle in the cause of Truth.'

'Those champions at least turned not their weapons against a weak, helpless woman,' replied Mary in a tone of considerable exasperation. 'When they opposed their Sovereign, it was to resist tyranny and oppression, not to deprive him of his dignity, and even curtail him of his very amusements. They fronted him boldly in the field, but they would have scorned to wound him in his tenderest feelings, or to attack him in the privacy of his household.'

'Your Majesty's shaft is well-aimed,' replied Knox ; 'yet doth it rebound harmless from the armour of duty in which the minister of the Word is encased. It is my calling, Madam, to reprove sin from the pulpit, whether it be found rearing its head on high in the palace or crawling among the sewers of the street. I tell you, Mary Stuart, that the day will come when your masques and your music and your mummeries shall be recorded against you in such characters of fire as roused Belshazzar and his nobles from their last revelry on earth. In your feastings and fiddlings and dancings do ye remember the dance of death, down which ye are footing it so thoughtlessly ? When your

ears are tickled by the foolish squeaking of your lutes, your rebecks, or your virginals, do ye reflect on the awful blast of the last trumpet and the wail of perdition coming up from the lake of fire?’

‘Then you esteem a simple innocent measure to be an unpardonable sin,’ retorted the Queen, in high scorn. ‘Master Knox, master Knox, is there not a certain virtue called Charity, without which all the others are of no avail?’

‘The guilt of the action, Madam,’ answered he, argumentatively, ‘depends on the motive of the dancer. David, indeed, leaped and danced before the Ark; but it was in pious zeal and singleness of heart. Not so that child of sin, the daughter of Herodias, graceful and fierce-hearted as the panther, when she danced off the head of John the Baptist. Think ye, Madam, that the walls of Holyrood will shelter the guilty more securely than the roof of Antipas? Think ye that can be but a harmless folly in the Queen of Scotland, which entailed the curse of blood on that flaunting minion who so charmed and cozened the Tetrarch of Galilee?’

‘And you dare to compare me to her!’ exclaimed Mary, rising from her chair with flashing eyes. ‘This is too much! Moray! Brother! I appeal to you! This is too much!’

And turning away she covered her face with both hands and burst into tears.

Even Knox could not see her thus unmoved. He hastened to explain away all that was most offensive in his allusions. As far as lay in his uncompromising nature, he strove to modify the virulence of his declamation.

‘Nay, Madam,’ said he; ‘to be effectual the remedies of the physician must be unpalatable; but I mean not to offend your Majesty, nor to be guilty of any disrespect towards your person. I would that you could see many matters in another and a clearer light for your own welfare and that of your people. It is my zeal for your Majesty’s happiness here and hereafter that makes me so stern and so unpleasant a counsellor. I will fulfil my duty even at the risk of your Majesty’s displeasure, and yet it grieves me in my human weakness to see your fair face sad. It is my daily prayer that Mary Stuart should be brought into the right path. I am an old man, Madam, if not in years, in labour and bodily infirmities. I am no courtier, ye know right well. Believe me, I cherish no disloyalty towards your person. I would fain see you a happy triumphant monarch, the joy of your people, the hope and stay of the godly, a fruitful branch in the vineyard, and a second Deborah in Israel!’

The Queen was easily mollified. A bright smile dried the tears on her face, and she stretched her hand graciously to the zealous Reformer.

‘Ye shall advise with me from time to time, master Knox,’ said she. ‘If I cannot compete with you in argument, I can at least equal you in truth and sincerity, and a good-will to do that which is right.’

The Churchman’s stern nature was moved. He bent over the hand she gave him, and made as though he would have touched it with his lips; then dropped it somewhat awkwardly, and resumed with a little embarrassment,

‘I am at your Majesty’s service always, second

only to His whose minister I am. Yet I beseech you to dismiss me. I may tarry no longer; even now I shall be blamed that I am not at my book.'

'Ye cannot be always at your book,' replied the Queen, smiling. 'Doth not Solomon tell us, "there is a time for all things?"'

'Even so, Madam,' answered Knox, moving respectfully towards the door; 'yet must Time himself be seized by the forelock, for his poll is bald behind. Master Buchanan would not fail to remind your Majesty,

"Fronte capillatâ post est occasio calva."

The Queen either imperfectly heard or did not perfectly understand, for she bowed her farewell without replying; but Moray, pondering on the adage, shook his head as he murmured, more to himself than to her,

'There is a time even for seizing the time; and it is but an indiscreet haste that would pluck the pear before it is ripe!'

As Knox traversed the ante-room in leaving the royal audience-chamber, he found the Maries sitting at work in that apartment, and paused for an instant on his way through, to contemplate that which was in truth a sufficiently pleasing scene. The ladies were seated in different attitudes at their embroidery, and although, doubtless, they had been in the full tide of conversation previously, there was a profound silence at the moment of his entrance.

Wistfully, nay sadly, with the concerned air of one who looks on a bed of lilies that he foresees are to be withered at night by the early frost, the Preacher gazed for an instant on this bevy of beauty ere he

uncovered his head to salute them. In doing so his cap slipped out of his hand to the ground, and it was curious to observe the behaviour of the Maries at this juncture. It is needless to state that master Knox enjoyed but a small share of popularity amongst these ladies. As the official reprover of all their gaieties and amusements, it may easily be understood that they looked on him with no approving eye, and that if they had one favourite aversion at the Court, next to a wet Valentine's day, it was master John Knox.

Though of active habits the great Reformer was somewhat stiff and enfeebled with rheumatism; he stooped with difficulty, and for awhile could not recover his lost head-gear.

Mistress Beton, sitting bolt upright, looked straight beyond him at the opposite wall with the air of being as unconscious of his presence as Mary Hamilton really was. The latter had indeed been all the morning immersed in a brown study from which it seemed impossible to extricate her. Mistress Carmichael was not in the best of humours, and it may be observed that her fair brow had of late been continually clouded, and her eyes full of tears, without apparent cause. She made not the slightest movement of assistance in the old man's favour, and even whispered something to Mary Seton with marked and offensive indifference; but the latter, springing gaily from her chair, picked up the fallen skull-cap and returned it to its owner with a pleasant smile, which, saucy as it was, brightened her whole face like a sunbeam.

'I thank thee, fair mistress,' said Knox. 'These old limbs of mine are stiff now, and the time is not far

off when they shall be motionless for evermore. Your knees are young and supple ; the more cause have you to be thankful and to bend them while you can in prayer.'

'The neck may be stiff as well as the knees,' answered Mary Seton, glancing meaningly towards the Queen's chamber. 'I hope my loyalty may outlast my lissomeness, if I live to be as old as your Reverence!'

He smiled on her sorrowfully yet kindly.

'The young,' said he, 'think that they are to live for ever, and the old hope still to live a few years longer. Fair mistress, fear God, do your duty, and snap your fingers at the chances of life.'

Mistress Beton here interposed with stately scorn.

'We shall scarce take lessons of master Knox,' said she, 'in our duty towards the Queen. Under favour, sir, we need none of your Reverence's teaching in loyalty and obedience.'

He turned good-humouredly towards her, still smiling.

'Ye are angry with me, fair ladies,' said he, 'and why? Because I am too old to learn your courtly graces, and too honest to use your courtly terms? Because I call a fig a fig when I see one, and a spade a spade. Nay, ye should rather prize and cherish one who can look even on *your* beauty without his eyes being dazzled, and tell you the truth for your salvation, rather than a lie for your ruin.'

'Ye speak fairly,' answered Mary Seton, who in virtue of her previous civility seemed to have constituted herself in some sort his protectress. 'Yet I warrant me ye spake not so tenderly to Her Majesty

even now. I marvel that ye are not abashed to look thus boldly in the face of an anointed Queen!

‘Nay, young lady,’ answered the Preacher, in a tone of pleasant humour, ‘why should the fair face of a gentlewoman frighten me, who have fronted many angry men. Think ye a bonny brow, unscored by guilt, can be an object of terror, whether it be crowned with a circle of gold like hers, or a wealth of bright hair like your own? No, no, the old man can neither be coaxed nor frightened from doing his duty.’

The Maries looked from one to the other in uncertainty. Knox had obviously gained their attention, and he added a few words with a good motive.

‘I tell ye the truth, fair ladies,’ said he, preparing to withdraw. ‘Better take it from me than the truth-teller to whom ye must listen some day, whether ye will or no. Aye! what a goodly life were this if it could last for ever, or if we might but pass to Heaven with all this gay gear; but out upon the knave Death! that cometh whether we will or no, and strippeth us of all, and taketh us we know not where! Prepare yourselves for him now, fair ladies, while he is afar, so when he cometh ye shall be found watching, and may laugh in his face.’

His admonition was well meant and received with sufficient decorum, but the impression soon faded away, for he had not been gone five minutes ere they fell to discussing his outward appearance, the severity of his manners, the fashion of his garments, and the general unloveliness of his demeanour.



CHAPTER XIX.

‘ I freighted my bark with the rich and rare,
Alice of Ormskirk, all for thee,
Little I reckoned of cost or care,
But I launched her out on a summer sea—

‘ A summer sea and a smiling sky,
Never a ripple and never a frown,
Never a token of shipwreck nigh;
What did it matter? The bark went down.



JOHN KNOX went back to his studies and his labours. The Queen and her Maries betook themselves to the duties of adornment and the preparations for a journey.

The Court was about to move for a season to the pleasant sea-side town of St. Andrew's in Fife, a favourite resort with Her Majesty, and much affected by the household, as their sojourn in the old episcopal city was marked by a gaiety and freedom from restraint exceedingly welcome both to the Sovereign and her Court. The cavalcade moved off in high spirits. It was but a small party, consisting at the most of not more than twenty equestrians, including the four maids-of-honour, and the more immediate attendants on the person of royalty. Horses stamped and snorted, and shook their bridles

merrily, as they were mounted at the palace-gates to move on in gay procession down the winding causeway that led towards the Firth. Feathers waved, spurs jingled, men's voices rose in merriment, and the soft laughter of women floated like music on the pure calm air. The dames of Queen Mary's household, like their Mistress, were skilful horsewomen, yet it was wonderful how many of those little attentions, which are so delightful to render and so welcome to receive, they exacted from the cavaliers who accompanied them. Horses were insufficiently bitted, saddles insecurely girthed, housings unbecomingly disposed; it seemed as if each of the fair travellers had reason to complain of her groom's negligence or incapacity, yet they bore it with exemplary good-humour notwithstanding. Even Mary Carmichael, after refusing assistance from every gentleman in turn, and bending her pretty fingers backward against an obstinate buckle, was fain to apply to Walter Maxwell for his help; and although it was rendered in the gravest and coldest manner possible, thanked him with a bright and kindly smile. It was, perhaps, the most provoking way to treat him. Had she quarreled with him outright, he would have known how to act, for he was hurt and angered to the depths of his loyal and resolute heart, but this off-hand good-humour was irritating in the extreme. It was treating him like a child, he thought, and he chafed under it inwardly, the while the girl herself was only striving to avoid a final rupture, and longing to be friends with him as before.

‘Do you journey with us to St. Andrew's?’ said she, glancing timidly at his immovable face, or do you

return to Holyrood from the water-side?' and her heart beat faster while she waited for his answer.

'As the Queen shall direct,' he replied, it must be admitted, not with his natural sincerity. 'I confess I am profoundly indifferent myself.' He spoke in a hard dry tone, and she made her horse bound forward from his side, and bent her head down to caress the animal, till her bright hair mingled with its mane.

The others rode gaily on, talking and laughing joyfully, all but the Queen. Mary Stuart was a thought paler than her wont, and unusually silent and pre-occupied. Was it that the remonstrances of master Knox had sunk into her heart? or was she over-laden with the cares of her kingdom? or was there some feeling of pity and compunction gnawing her, foreign to the weightier considerations of religion and policy, yet, perhaps, keener and more engrossing than these? Whatever might be the reason, she, who was generally so eager, so buoyant, on an expedition like this, now rode listlessly and carelessly with her hand resting idle on her knee, and her rein lying loose on her horse's neck. 'Black Agnes,' however, by no means shared the dejection of her Mistress. That favourite palfrey, a gift from her brother Moray, and called after the famous Agnes of Dunbar, who was Countess of Moray in her own right, was in the highest spirits at her release from the stable, and sharing the mettle of the tameless heroine whose name she bore, was no eligible conveyance for an inattentive horsewoman. Ere the gleaming waters of the Firth were in sight, the black mare shied at a beggar on the road-side and swerved from him with such activity, that Mary, unprepared as

she was, must have been unseated had a dexterous hand not seized her bridle-rein at the decisive moment, and a ready arm supported her till she regained her balance in the saddle.

‘It is the last service I may render my Queen,’ said Chastelâr’s low sad voice in her ear. ‘Oh! Madam, send me not away from you, I beseech you!’

She knew he was in the cavalcade, indeed she had never retracted the permission originally given, that he should accompany the Court to St. Andrew’s, and perhaps something had told her he was not riding very far off, although she had resolved to treat him henceforth with enforced coldness and reserve. As she turned to thank him now, and marked his gallant bearing, the skill with which he rode his mettled chestnut horse, the bravery of his apparel, the respectful deference of his manner, and the pale worn face that told of so much sorrow and suffering, the Queen’s heart swelled with that remorseful pity which is not many degrees removed from a softer feeling.

‘You must leave me now,’ she said hurriedly. ‘I will tell you more when we are embarked. You shall come to me then for your last directions, Chastelâr, and to bid me farewell!’

‘Is there *no* hope?’ he asked in a low stifled whisper.

‘None,’ she answered firmly, in the same guarded tone. ‘Oh! Chastelâr! I pity you,’ she added, while the tears sprang to her eyes; ‘from my heart I pity you, but it *must* be so.’

He fell back quietly and humbly. Mary put ‘Black Agnes’ into a gallop, and the cavalcade were soon en-

gaged in all the bustle of embarkation at the water-side.

It was Valentine's Day, and the weather was indeed in unison with that mild and popular saint. It was one of those soft pleasant days, with a calm atmosphere and a serene though clouded sky, that come in the early spring to remind us of the principles of growth and fragrance, still existing, though dormant, in the bosom of the teeming earth. The russet sward was saturated with moisture, and not a bud had yet started into life, not a snowdrop lifted its gentle head on the southern side of the sleeping braes and shaws, heavy with the promise of another year. Ashore, the rooks were flocking to the fresh turned glebe, where the bright ploughshare, sticking in the furrow, marked that the half-day's work was done ; while, on the broad Firth, soft and smooth and white as milk, the dark sea-bird rode calm and motionless, as if at anchor, poised on the surface of his home ; the distant mountains loomed grand and dim and sullen, the nearer points and promontories shot sharply out into the water, clearly defined against the sheeted level of the Firth ; the very tide seemed but to heave and sob at intervals, lapping drowsily against the dripping seaweed on the rocks. It was a scene of beauty, but beauty of a softening, saddening tendency, and all on board were fain to acknowledge its melancholy influence and partake in the depression it produced.

The sturdy boatmen bent to their oars ; the courtiers, disposed in different attitudes, appeared chiefly intent on arriving at the termination of their voyage ; and Mary, sitting in the stern of the boat, dipped her

hand idly in the water, silent and gazing downwards, in obvious disquietude of mind.

Chastelâr watched the Queen with eager eyes. After a while he struck a few notes on the lute, without which he seldom travelled; and observing that this, as usual, was the signal for general attention, and that Mary did not seem to disapprove, proceeded to play a mournful melody, which as it rose and fell, he accompanied in apparent abstraction with his voice.

‘Gone! wholly gone! How cold and dark;
A cheerless world, of hope bereft;
The beacon quenched, and not a spark
In all the dull grey ashes left.

‘No more, no more, a living part
In life’s contending maze to own;
Dead to its kind, an empty heart
Feeds on itself alone!—alone!

‘The present all a blank, and worse;
No ray along the future cast;
All blighted by the blighting curse
Except the past!—except the past!

‘Aye, if the cup be crushed and spilt,
More than the sin the loss I rue,
And if the cloud was black with guilt
The silver light of love shone through.

‘And though the price be maddening pain;
One half their rapture to restore,
And live those blissful hours again,
I’d pay the cruel price once more.

‘Dreams! Dreams! Not backward flows the tide
Of life and love,—it cannot be:
Well—thine the triumph and the pride,
The suffering and the shame for me!’

As he concluded, even the rough boatmen looked from one to the other in undisguised approval. Never insensible to the charms of music have been these bold sons of the sea. To this day they are persuaded that the silver shoals of herring are attracted by harmonious sounds, and they dredge for oysters with a low monotonous chant, that they believe peculiarly grateful to that retiring zoophyte. Long after Chastelâr's last notes had died gradually out over the silent waters, they laid to their oars with a will, and seemed to pull their long sweeping strokes in measured cadence to the unforgotten strain. The Maries, too, applauded enthusiastically, all but one, and she was weeping in silence, because her heart was full.

In the stern of the boat, a wide roomy shallop, pulled by some six or eight oars, the Queen sat apart from the rest of the company. More than once she had glanced at Chastelâr while he sung, and varying expressions, none of them in keeping with the serene sky overhead, had crossed her brow. After he had finished she remained silent for several minutes, absorbed in deep reflection. By degrees as they approached the opposite shore of Burntisland, and the hills of Fife began to rise clear and brown above the black jagged rocks, and level strips of white sand that edged the water's margin, the attention of Her Majesty's train became diverted to the different objects around, and anon a shoal of porpoises, tumbling to windward in grotesque succession, drew them, with many exclamations of wonder and amusement, to the bows.

None were now left in the stern of the boat save the

Queen and the steersman. That ancient Triton's whole attention was rivetted, seaman-like, on the shallows they were nearing, where for the first time during their passage, the rolling waves were breaking languidly into surf. Chastelâr remained in the place he had never quitted, his eyes fixed on the Queen's face. She beckoned him to approach, and in an instant he was at her side.

'We remain at Burntisland to-night,' said Mary, in a low measured voice that seemed the result either of extreme indifference or perfect self-command. 'In the morning we shall ride on to St. Andrew's. I have a packet that must be delivered without delay at Dunfermline. Can I depend upon you to undertake its safe arrival there before to-morrow's dawn?'

He assented eagerly. This was no such distant banishment! He should be under the same sky, within a day's journey! the light of hope shone over his face, but while the Queen proceeded in those dry chilling tones, it faded as it came.

'You will ride thence to Stirling, where you will remain until you receive instructions from Maitland or Melvil. They will be accompanied by letters for the French Court, and on the instant of their receipt you will depart for Paris. Chastelâr, I depend upon your obedience—you will not fail me.'

The cold drops stood on his forehead. It was in a broken hollow voice, that he replied,

'My life is in your hands. Do with me what you will!'

Again her kindly heart smote her sore. It was a fearful gift this charm that she possessed. It was a dread-

ful responsibility thus to hold the happiness of a human being, so to speak, in her hand. Could she dash it to pieces without some tinge of pity and remorse? She resumed her task very sadly and unwillingly.

‘It is better,’ said she, ‘that this should be done at once. Queen though she be, nay, *because* she is a Queen, Mary Stuart may not listen for a moment to the voice of her own feelings, nor the impulse of her own heart, pitying as it does those who are in trouble, though their sufferings and their sorrows spring from their own deed. Nay,’ she added, seeing him about to speak, and deprecating his words, as it were, with a gentle, almost a caressing gesture of her white hand, ‘there is nothing you can urge that shall induce me to alter my determination. A woman’s heart is weak, but her *will* is iron as a man’s. It *must* be so Chastelâr, for your own sake—and—and for mine!’

‘Oh, God!’ he exclaimed, in an agony like a man writhing under a death-blow. ‘Have pity—have pity! Anything but this—any disgrace, any punishment, any ordeal. But oh! think of the forlorn despairing prayer, “Entreat me not to leave thee!”’

The tears dropped fast from her eyes, and the beautiful face quivered in its struggle to be firm. What was that to him? He could only think her hard, unfeeling as the sea-board rock. She yielded not an inch.

‘It *must* be so,’ she repeated, ‘loyal and true, you will not fail me at last!’

His eyes flashed with anger. Man’s nature can scarce endure great sorrow without a tinge of resentment.

‘Loyalty and truth are soon forgotten in the absent,’

said he, bitterly. 'Lip-service and flattery are more welcome to princes. I cannot refuse to make room for a newer favourite!'

She smiled on him gentle and forgiving through her tears.

'You are unjust,' she said, 'and unkind; you know it is not so, and when you are far off it will be your punishment to think that you could have spoken such words to me to-day.'

The re-action of his feelings was frightful: he put his hand to his throat as if he was choking, and gasped out in broken syllables,

'Forgive me! only forgive me before I go out from the light into eternal darkness and despair!'

'Obedience?' she asked in her turn, looking wistfully at the shore which they were now approaching, and on their arrival at which, something perhaps warned her that she must take her last leave of Chastelâr and his unselfish, unexacting devotion.

'To the death!' he replied, and even while he spoke the boatmen shipped their oars, and those who were forward leaped out waist-deep in water, to steady the shallop for the disembarkation of the ladies.

This was no such easy task. In these days people walk from a roomy steamer roofed in and glazed like a conservatory, across a platform securely railed on to a substantial stone-built quay that reaches a quarter of a mile out into the Firth, and renders them as independent of tide as the vessel herself does of weather; save for the slight oscillation caused by the motive power, a blind man, unless in a gale of wind, would never know that he had left *terra firma*. But even

within the recollection of those now scarce past middle age, the crossing of the Firth was an affair of considerable discomfort if not a little danger. The state of the tide was of paramount importance; the transit in an open boat, generally of the smallest and craziest description, to the steamer moored half-a-mile off, was in itself a voyage of no slight apprehension to the timid, especially if the wind had been blowing for two or three days steadily from the east, and the disembarkation on the northern side was, if possible, worse; the boat had to be beached with practised dexterity not to capsize altogether, and under the most favourable circumstances the pursuing waves were pretty sure to come dashing in over her stern, wetting to the skin those unwary passengers who had not taken refuge at the prow.

At low water also a considerable journey had to be made which partook of the discomforts both of land and sea, inasmuch as it was performed in the ungainly fashion termed by school-boys 'pick-a-back' on the shoulders of veteran boatmen wading knee-deep through the surf. To a heavy weight and a timid rider this mode of progression was also not without its terrors, for if the bearer, generally old and often infirm, made the slightest false step, a very complete ducking was the inevitable result.

In this hazardous mode it was necessary to land the Queen and her ladies on their arrival at Burntisland: the scene was one of bustle, dash, and excitement, none the less picturesque for the hard-weather appearance of the boatmen and the gaudy dresses of the fishermen's wives and daughters, who came down in

numbers to welcome their Sovereign, and shrank not from criticizing in loud ear-piercing tones the personal appearance of the party, and the whole details of the proceeding.

The horses that had been conveyed across in the boat accompanying the Queen's, splashed one after another into the water amidst shouts of laughter, and half swam, half-scrambled ashore as they might. The retainers and men-at-arms jeered each other merrily as they waded through the waves, or wrung the wet from their boots and clothing on the sand; the female spectators screamed out their advice and opinions, fluttering aloof shrill and pertinacious as the sea-mews themselves, whilst-white-headed urchins ran hither and thither through the crowd, devising impossible jobs which they professed their readiness to perform for the smallest remuneration in copper. But the Queen's shallop excited the interest and attention of all.

One by one the ladies were received into the arms of their attending boatmen to be conveyed tenderly and carefully ashore. In right of his years, his experience, his patriarchal dignity, and his solemn demeanour, the oldest of these mariners was intrusted with the person of the Queen. He was a stalwart, fine old man, broad in the shoulders, deep in the chest, large of stature and strong of limb. He took Mary in his arms as if she had been a baby, and waded with her deliberately through the surf: another score of yards and she would have been safe on land; but whether the veteran had been celebrating his prospective distinction by deep potations of alcohol, or whether his toil-worn frame failed him at the pinch, or whether it

was indeed by one of those fatalities for which it is impossible to account, he made a false step, a fruitless effort to recover it, and but for prompt assistance must have precipitated his royal burden before him into the water.

Need we say that it was Chastelâr who was at hand to save ; that it was his grasp which plucked the Queen from her falling supporter at this critical juncture ; and that for a few blissful moments, worth to his delirious fancy whole ages of torture, the love-stricken poet for the first and last time bore the precious form of Mary Stuart in his arms.

Slowly, carefully, gently he waded with her to the land ; not a word was spoken,—not a look exchanged ; the Queen's face was cold and impassive as marble, and Chastelâr in the tumult of his love and his despair was conscious but of one frantic wish, that the waves would rise over their heads and cover them, and they might be at rest fathom-deep down there together for evermore.



CHAPTER XX.

- ‘ Night by night must I pace the shore,
Longing, lingering, to and fro,
Questioning, “ May I not see her once more,
Alice of Ormskirk ? ” answering—“ No ! ”
- ‘ And still the echoing sea-cave rings
With one unceasing pitiless strain ;
And still the wild wave dashes and sings—
“ Never again, love ! never again. ” ’
-



THE episode of idolatry and madness was fast drawing to a close. When the Queen and her household went to establish themselves in the lodging where they designed to pass the night, Chastelâr remained on the beach, apparently unconscious of all about him, gazing out to sea-ward, as a man does who is utterly lost to the interests and occupations of the shore. Amongst the many mysterious sympathies that connect natural objects so inexplicably with the mind, there is a strange affinity between human sorrow and the watery element—be it the gentle ripple of a running stream or the dash and recoil of the mounting wave breaking on the beach, or the dark-blue line of a sea-horizon clear against the sky.

There is some morbid attraction to mortal grief in the contemplation of each of these ; there is something that takes man out of himself, and though it speaks not of hope nor consolation, seems to promise oblivion and repose at last. Aye, we love to prate of the beauties of nature, to enlarge upon the pleasures of smiling skies and gorgeous landscapes and magnificent scenery. Are we quite honest about the effect produced by such objects ? and can we declare that they create sensations of unmingled gratification ? On the contrary, most of us, if sincere, will confess that when we were happy we took very little notice of them, and it was but in some keen hopeless sorrow we turned to nature for an anodyne, and found she added sharpness to our pangs and mocked us with a smile as she poured fresh venom into the wound. No ; if we would be consoled we must look to where the running stream loses itself in the ocean that we have never seen ; we must carry our thoughts athwart the far horizon in search of the eternal shore ; we must strain our eyes to pierce the smiling heaven, and catch if but a glimpse of the undying world beyond.

Chastelâr paced to and fro upon the sand with all the worst passions of our nature tearing at a heart that yet seemed formed for better things. Utterly undisciplined in his wild imaginative character, he had never prepared himself for such complete desolation as this. For many years, more than he now dared count, the smiles of that beautiful Queen had been to him dearer than the very air he breathed. A less enthusiastic temperament would have asked itself long ago, to what result this abject service, this blind ador-

ation, could eventually lead, and would, at least, have prepared for the final shock, which it required little sagacity to foresee must sooner or later tumble the magic edifice to the ground; but Chastelâr's was a character that never stops to count the cost.

There was to him an unspeakable joy in the very abandonment of his attachment, in the lavish devotion which only asked to be received without return. Full of a generous fire kindled in his own ardent imagination, and nourished by those seductive follies which constituted the very essence of an age of chivalry, it seemed to him as rich a happiness to cherish his hopeless attachment for the Queen, as it would have seemed to a coarser and stronger mind to possess itself of Mary's heart and person. The poet never dreamed the time could come when he should be told that even this self-sacrifice was unwelcome; that for one unguarded word, wrung from him by the very depth and tenderness of his feelings, he should be banished from her presence, and that she who was the light of his eyes should herself determine that he must look upon her no more.

Presently the devil got into his heart; the rebellious spirit, that is never so strong as when men feel they have been virtuous and self-denying in vain, rose tumultuous now, all the fiercer for having been kept down so long, and urged the counsels of despair. Of what availed his old and faithful service, his constancy, his loyalty, his obedience and truth? She flung them away as nothing, and less than nothing; she could take his warm fresh heart from him when it suited her, as a mere matter of pastime, and squeezing it, as one would squeeze an orange, give it him back again

when she had no further use for it, all withered and empty, the very essence of its existence gone.

Queen though she were, she had no right to do this. She forbade him her presence! He would see her whether she would or no! He had done with obedience now and discretion and consideration! He would speak to Mary Stuart once more if all the devils in hell rose to prevent it!

Turning on his steps he strode fiercely along the now solitary shore in the direction of the hamlet of Burntisland, where the Queen was to pass the night. Already the day was waning, and the evening mist gathering from the eastward crept slowly up the margin of the Firth. A light drizzling rain had also begun to fall, and the sea-gulls, no longer floating in repose, were screaming and turning restlessly on the wing, as they flitted to and fro in search of shelter for the night. Boatmen and fish-wives had betaken themselves to their homes, and none were left to witness the gestures of anger and despair with which the unhappy Chastelâr accompanied his racking, maddening thoughts. He wrapped his cloak round him, and walked faster and faster as he began to shape his resolve.

But within a short distance of the hamlet he met a figure approaching him through the increasing gloom: a female figure, cloaked and hooded, walking swiftly, yet with smooth majestic gait, and of a stature that seemed unusually lofty in that uncertain light. For an instant the blood gathered round his heart as a possibility flashed across him that even in his madness he could scarcely dare believe. In that space of time

a thousand frantic surmises swept through his brain. Reaction, remorse, a woman's pity, and a woman's tenderness, over-riding all, even the reserve and dignity of a Queen. But the foolish fancies died out rapidly as they arose, for the figure stopped, handed him in silence a small packet tied round with a morsel of silk (he could notice such a trifle even then), and while she threw back her hood with a gesture of relief, the clear guileless eyes of Mary Hamilton looked him sadly and enquiringly in the face.

She spoke not for awhile, she seemed to stop and take breath; then she said very quietly and coldly,

'The Queen bade me bring you this. She says it must be forwarded without delay.'

He bowed courteously. He had recovered himself now, for he had a scheme in view, and shaping it out rapidly in his working brain he bethought him that here was an unconscious instrument which he might turn to good account.

'How did you know where to find me?' he asked, forcing himself to smile.

A bright blush swept over the maid-of-honour's forehead, but she paled again almost immediately as she replied,

'I saw you from our window walking on the shore. I knew it was you, and I asked to bring the packet myself because they tell me you are going away to-night, and I was anxious to bid you Farewell.'

This was a great deal for Mary Hamilton to say. No successful gallant could have wrung such an avowal from her lips; but the keen eye of affection had told her that Chastelâr was dejected and unhappy, so she

longed to console him and speak kindly to him ere he went away.

Should he not have pitied her? He who knew what it was to love in vain? Of all women on earth he should have spared *her*, but the devil had entered into him, and he saw in this pure unselfish affection a way to his own object; so she, too, must be sacrificed without remorse. What did it matter? Was *he* alone to suffer and be trampled under foot?

‘It was good of you, mistress Hamilton,’ he replied with a soft glance from his dark eyes, that made her flush and tremble where she stood. ‘Few but yourself would have been so considerate, and I should have valued the kindness as much from *none*. Shall I leave *one* person at Court to regret me when I am gone?’

‘More than that,’ she answered hurriedly, and scarce knowing what she said. ‘There will be no music for us now, at least none worth listening to. The Queen said so herself—and—and—are you not coming back again?’

‘Never!’ he replied darkly, and then seeing her scared and troubled face, adding with a laugh, ‘Never is a long word, is it not? and who can tell in such a country as this what a few months may bring? But I shall be absent a weary while, mistress Hamilton, and I cannot bear unkindness from those I love. I would not willingly be forgotten, and supplanted by newer faces.’

Her eloquent eyes told him *that* was impossible, but she dared not trust herself to speak.

‘Will you think of me when I am gone?’ he proceeded in a lower tone, and pressing nearer his com-

panion's side. 'When you are feasting merrily at Holyrood, and enjoying dance and song and revelry, will you not keep one little corner in your heart for the absent who used to do all in his poor power to make your time pass pleasantly, who will be thinking every hour so sadly and longingly of you?'

Even in the midst of her astonished happiness she experienced a shadowy misgiving that it was too good to be real; but she could only reply,

'You must think very poorly of us all, Chastelâr, if you imagine we could ever forget you.'

'It is not distance that can separate those who care for each other,' resumed the poet, dreamily; 'after all, it is thought that unites soul to soul; that sea-bird's wing would droop ere he had traversed a thousand miles of ocean, and yet twice the distance separates the lover from his mistress no more than a score of yards and a brick wall. He can be with her in spirit, although his body may be at the uttermost end of the earth. Nevertheless, for all this, mistress Hamilton, it grieves me sore to bid you farewell.'

She could have listened to him for an hour; she loved to hang on his musical accents, and drink in the tones of his rich Southern voice; above all, were such sentiments as these congenial to her own lofty conceptions of an ideal, and her trusting clinging heart.

He was pitiless; he went on speaking low and hurriedly,

'We may not meet again for many, many months—perhaps never in this world. Do you think I am a man of marble that I cannot feel? Do you think *mine* is a happy lot, thus to leave all I value or esteem and take

not even hope with me into exile? Mary Hamilton, you will not refuse me what I ask you on such a day as this?’

‘I would give my life for yours,’ she answered, scarce above her breath. ‘What is it you would have me do?’

‘Listen,’ he replied. ‘I must be in the saddle soon after night-fall. For reasons I cannot explain to you, it must be supposed by the household that I have departed at sun-down. My very life is in danger, if I am known to have remained. I cannot tell you why. Do you trust me?’

She bowed her head.

‘I trust you,’ she answered, very quietly, and he needed only to look in her face for confirmation of her words.

‘Then grant me my request,’ he resumed. ‘It is a foolish fancy of mine, but *you* at least cannot blame, though you may scoff at it. There is one person whom I must see the very last before I depart. One face of which I must take the picture with me, into banishment, engraven on my heart, one hand of which the farewell pressure must remain on mine till we meet again. An hour after supper, I will be at the door of the small garden into which your apartments open. You will meet me there, for the last, *last* time?’

She looked a good deal frightened and discomposed.

‘But I shall not be dismissed so soon,’ she urged, ‘and if I am absent they will come to look for me everywhere, and oh! I ought not! I ought not!’

He was prepared for her objection, he knew the Queen’s habits so well; this was exactly what he wanted.

‘Nay, then,’ he resumed, ‘I will ask you to risk

nothing for my sake ; and yet, see the last of the dear face I must and will. The days are short now. It is already twilight, and it will be as dark as midnight in an hour. I will go make my preparations for departure. Do you as you enter unlock the garden-door and take the key with you ; it cannot then be fastened from inside. I will conceal myself amongst the shrubs and wait for you there. As soon as you are dismissed for the night you can come out and bid me farewell.'

'It is better not,' she murmured in sad perturbation. She could not bear to refuse him, and yet all her womanly feelings revolted at the clandestine nature of such a proceeding. 'We are close at home now. All good attend you, Chastelâr. I will pray for you night and morning—farewell!'

She gave him her hand, as if to take her final leave, but she had not the heart to withdraw it at once. It lingered long and lovingly in his clasp.

'Mary!' said he, and the dear name came so tenderly off his lips. 'Mary! you will not let me part from you thus?'

'I will do as you wish,' was all she answered, once more dropping the hood over her face and hurrying away. They were within a stone's throw of the Queen's lodging, and it was already time for her to resume her duties. Her mind was in a sad tumult when she left him. She felt she was going to do wrong, deliberately wrong ; yet how could she refuse him ? She loved him so, and he was going away !

With a wicked smile, suggestive of anything but mirth or happiness, engraven, as it were, on his coun-

tenance, Chastelâr strode up the narrow street to the stable in which his trusty chestnut was disposed. This animal was a gift from the Queen, and valued accordingly. We would fain describe him from his velvet muzzle to his flinty hoofs, for where shall we find so seductive a theme as the beauty of a horse? but will only observe that he was in every respect a fitting present from Royalty. The Frenchman ordered his favourite to be saddled with considerable parade, and spoke loudly of the journey before him. Then, ostentatiously assuming his arms and valise, mounted and rode away in the direction of Dunfermline, followed as his figure disappeared in the gloom, by the admiring glances of such ostlers and retainers as his noisy departure had gathered to observe him.

For a mile or so he proceeded along the coast and then, turning off the horse-track into the recess of an old quarry, dismounted and fastened his horse to the roots of a whin-bush, growing from the chinks in the cold blue stone. For all his feverish excitement, he disposed the animal in a nook sheltered from the chill east wind, and taking his own cloak from about him cast it over the flanks of his dumb friend. Then, with a farewell pat, he returned on foot the way he had come, rapidly and breathlessly, never stopping till he reached the hamlet of Burntisland, and saw the lights twinkling once more in the Queen's lodging.

He stole softly to the garden-gate, of which he had spoken to Mary Hamilton. It opened noiselessly to his push. By this time it was quite dark, and on entering the enclosure he found no necessity for concealment amongst the scanty shrubs it contained. Here he drew

off his heavy horseman's boots with extreme caution, and thus, with his rapier at his side and his pistols in his belt, took up his position close against the door of the house, which opened outwards.

Here he waited, watched, and listened. A drizzling rain was falling and the wind was very keen, but though stripped to his doublet and hose, Chastelâr was unconscious of the weather. Had he been immersed in snow, he could scarce have felt cold while that fever burned and raged so fiercely at his heart.



CHAPTER XXI.

'For constancy hath her place above,
And life is thorny, and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.'

THE Queen's supper and the *couchée* which succeeded it seemed endless. Her Majesty, though by no means in her usual spirits, eating but little, and scarcely speaking at all, was yet none the more disposed to dismiss her ladies and betake herself to repose. Mary Hamilton with flushed cheeks and unsettled gestures, busied herself about every arrangement she could think of that should further the process of retiring for the night, till even the Queen, rousing from her meditations, taxed her with being fatigued after her ride, and did not scruple to hint at the remarkable restlessness of her demeanour. After this she controlled herself indeed with an effort, but felt the while that if the suspense continued much longer it would drive her mad.

It was Mary Seton's turn and hers to put the Queen to bed, and the gossiping propensities of the former, whose lively disposition never acknowledged fatigue or low spirits, did by no means conduce to the dispatch of matters. For reasons of her own, too, this young lady

chose to ask a series of questions concerning the Earl of Bothwell, and the probability of his returning to Court, interspersed with remarks on that nobleman and his borderers and his enemies, all delivered with considerable freedom and a flippancy peculiar to herself. The Queen, who seemed to-night more or less impatient of every subject broached, at length called her a 'saucy chatterbox' and bade her good-humouredly 'hold her tongue.' As usual the reproof only produced a merry smile and a provoking little grimace at which Her Majesty could not forbear laughing, though she looked sadder than ever a moment afterwards.

Wearily the minutes passed on; Mary Hamilton had never before thought Royalty so exacting or an attendance on her own dear Mistress so tiresome. One by one the Queen's garments had to be taken off, folded up and disposed each in its proper place; then the loose flowing gown was brought her by the senior maid-of-honour, and the junior let down the long, rich hair that covered her more nobly than the mantle of royalty itself. While mistress Seton combed and stroked those chestnut tresses carefully, mistress Hamilton brought a bason and ewer, offering it on her knees; after which ceremony it was her duty to place an ivory crucifix and a small lamp, with the Queen's breviary on the table by her bedside; then she handed Her Majesty's beautiful rosary, consisting of beads of sandal-wood inlaid with silver, and Mary Stuart betook her after the manner of the Ancient Faith to those devotions she never neglected in her chequered life, and that served her so nobly in the hour of trial with which it closed.

The maids-of-honour retired. Mary Seton would fain

have prolonged the conversation even on the threshold of their mutual chamber. She was never tired, not she! but her friend, vowing she had forgotten something in the supper-room, hurried away down stairs, with a feeling of intense relief and yet horribly frightened and uncomfortable, as she fled like a lap-wing along the dark passages towards the garden.

The servants and retainers had all gone to their repose wearied with the toils of the day and anticipating an early start on the morrow. Even in that small house there was something gloomy and alarming in the profound silence. Mary Hamilton, while conscious of the purity of her motives, trembled as innocence always does tremble, far more violently than guilt; and it was with a beating heart and quick-coming breath that she reached the door, and unfastening it gently, peered out into the thick darkness beyond.

For a minute or two she waited, listening anxiously. Not a sound was to be heard but the dull beat of the tide upon the shore. Then she advanced a few paces into the garden, now that it seemed likely to elude her, more resolved upon the interview than she could have believed possible a short while ago. The small rain struck chill against her face, and she strained her eyes in vain to pierce the surrounding gloom.

Had she turned round at this moment she might perhaps have faintly distinguished a dark shadow that passed swiftly from behind the door and entered the house by the passage she had just quitted.

But she was intent only on Chastelâr. She stepped softly to the garden-door and peeped into the sandy

lane on which it opened. Here there was a little more light, and she could see some ten or a dozen paces to right and left. No living object was discernible; the rain fell faster and the tide moaned and gurgled in its ebb and flow against the shallow beach.

Mary Hamilton was puzzled and distressed. An hour ago she would have hailed as an unspeakable relief the news that Chastelâr had actually gone without further parley, but now that she had been schooling herself and stringing her nerves for an interview, it was provoking that so much agitation should be wasted for nothing; it seemed hard and cruel not to see him just once again.

She ventured on a gentle cough; a timid whisper, very soft and cautious; there was no result. At last she spoke his name out loud, and then, half-frightened and a good deal disappointed, made her way back into the house, barring the door after her with as little noise as her trembling hands would permit.

Poor Mary Hamilton! In that dark passage she paused to lay her head against the wall and weep. She dared not return at once to the chamber which she shared with her comrades, in case any one of them should be awake. She felt she could not brook observation or remark on her streaming eyes and agitated looks. As the tears flowed silently they did her so much good! For weeks the girl had been living in a morbid state of overstrung excitement. Continually in the presence of the man she loved, and that man gifted with many brilliant qualities exceedingly attractive to the female heart; never convinced of his preference, yet suspecting it from a thousand trifles that she

naturally interpreted in her own favour; living in an atmosphere of alternate hope and fear, exposed to the daily charm of his person, his conversation, his musical talents, and his warm foreign cordiality, it was no wonder that she hailed as a blissful relief the certainty which she was persuaded had burst upon her to-day, even though accompanied by the miserable conviction that she must bid him a long, perhaps a hopeless farewell. The sweet and the bitter were strangely mingled in the cup she had drained so eagerly, the cup that slakes but never quenches thirst. She was so relieved and yet so troubled; so proud, and yet so fearful; so happy, yet so sad.

What could a poor woman do but droop her head and weep her heart out, simply because she *was* a woman.

Suddenly she started as if she had been shot. A loud shriek, followed by a succession of outcries for assistance in the Queen's voice, rang through the small house, and were quickly followed by the scuffling of feet, the banging of doors, and the tumult of many tongues, in which the shrill tones of the maids-of-honour predominated. Lights were already glancing in the passages; women in white with pale, scared faces, and half-dressed men but half-awake, snatching at whatever weapons came to hand, rushed to and fro tumultuously; everybody seemed exceedingly alarmed and excited, but none to know the least what was the matter. All this Mary Hamilton observed as we see things in a dream, while she rushed up-stairs and dashed unhesitatingly into the Queen's chamber.

The sight that met her there arrested her as if by magic on the threshold. In the twinkling of an

eye the warm impulsive woman seemed frozen into a statue.

Pale as her night-gear, breathless and trembling, while she clung to her brother's shoulder for support, yet with the 'Stuart frown' stamped sternly on her brow, the Queen was gazing in fear and anger on the dark figure of a man who stood with his arms folded in the corner of the apartment. That man, calm, erect, defiant, almost sublime in the intrepidity with which he confronted threatening brows and levelled weapons (for already the royal retainers were filling the place), was Chastelâr. Mary Hamilton turned sick and giddy while she looked. The Queen raved and shook and seemed half mad with fear and shame; her ladies crowded about her in helpless astonishment and dismay, while the servants and men-at-arms glanced from one to another utterly at their wits'-end. Except the fatal cause himself of all this disturbance, Moray alone seemed to retain his presence of mind. Alternately he soothed his frantic sister, and gave directions to the astonished bystanders.

'Stab him!' exclaimed the Queen, pointing with shaking hand at the unfortunate man who stood there, so pale, so calm, offering no attempt at escape or resistance. 'Brother, for the honour of our house, put your sword through him, an' ye be half a Stuart. Let him not live an hour to boast of this daring, this atrocious insult. Oh! it is too much—too much!'

The Queen covered her face with both hands, completely overcome; her beautiful hair, escaping from the ribbon which confined it, fell over her shoulders to her waist.

Chastelâr looked proudly and lovingly at her even then. Madman! even then!

‘Nay, Madam,’ urged Moray, with soothing accents, ‘bethink you, I beseech your Grace. In the name of prudence and discretion, bid me not dip my hands in the blood of this man. Remember you have yourself treated him with over-courtesy and kindness, to the offence of your nobility and, pardon me for saying it, to the scandal of the Court. Reflect, Madam, what shall the world think of it when they hear that a Queen’s musician was found in a Queen’s bed-chamber and put to death lest he should tell the tale.’

The Queen raised her head with flashing eyes.

‘You *dare* to shield him, Moray! You, my own blood!’ she vociferated. ‘On your allegiance I charge you. What! You will never let him speak! To the death with him on the spot!’

But Moray knew the pliant and forgiving nature of her with whom he had to deal.

‘Nay, Madam,’ said the prudent Earl, ‘patience; I entreat you, patience; the unhappy man is clearly distraught; let us not shed his blood unwittingly. He shall be brought to justice and punished according to his deserving, so shall his treason be sufficiently expiated by death. Remove him,’ he added, speaking composedly to the men-at-arms who crowded round the door. ‘Bind him forthwith, and let him be placed securely in ward.’

Chastelâr still remained perfectly immovable; never once had he taken his eyes off the Queen’s face; never once had the strange longing, loving gaze, with its dash of wild triumph and its depth of intense affection,

faded or varied for an instant. While they bound him fast, drawing a girdle tight round his arms above the elbow, he neither seemed to feel the pressure nor to be conscious of the indignity; while they pressed round him and hustled him from the room, his looks never strayed for an instant from the Queen.

All this Mary Hamilton saw as if in a trance. Though every stroke of her pulse beat with a loud stupefying clang upon her brain, she knew that this was reality, that this was truth, that there was no hope of awaking to find it all a dream; but when Chastelâr reached the door, and beholding the Queen no longer seemed roused to consciousness at last, she met his eye for the first time, and the whole hopeless misery of her situation rushed upon her at once.

He smiled on her very sadly and kindly, there was a pitying remorseful expression in his face, a wistful mournful tenderness in his glance; she could bear it no longer, and she fainted dead away upon the floor.

END OF VOL. I.

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